

PRACTICING ORGANIZATIONAL TENSIONS:
TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF
PARADOXES OF LEGITIMACY, SCALING AND
TEMPORALITY IN TACKLING GRAND
CHALLENGES

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“But one must not think ill of the paradox, for the paradox is the passion of thought, and the thinker without the paradox is like the lover without passion: a mediocre fellow. But the ultimate potentiation of every passion is always to will its own downfall, and so it is also the ultimate passion of the understanding to will the collision, although in one way or another the collision must become its downfall. This, then, is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think.”

Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 1844

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Article I: Conceptual Foundations of Workforce Homogeneity in the Public Sector. Insights from a Systematic Review on Causes, Consequences, and Blind Spots (Iris Seidemann/Kristina Weißmüller)

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Article II: A Journey to the Upside Down: Challenging the Paradox Debate in Organization Studies through Problematization (Iris Seidemann)

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Article III: Caught in a Trap: Media's Role in the Co-Creation of a Paradox of Legitimacy Repair (Iris Seidemann/Daniel Geiger)

Konzeption/Planung: 80%

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Article IV: Nobody Said It Was Easy – System Level Dynamics in the Emergence and Navigation of Multi-Actor Paradoxes (Iris Seidemann/Daniel Geiger/Lisa Harborth)

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Die vorliegende Einschätzung in Prozent über die von mir erbrachte Eigenleistung wurde mit den am Artikel beteiligten Koautor:innen einvernehmlich abgestimmt.

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Iris Seidemann

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List of Abbreviations

ASA	Attraction-Selection-Attrition
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CEA	Community Engagement and Accountability
EAP	Early Action Protocol
FbF	Forecast-based Financing
GloFAS	Global Flood Awareness System
HRM	Human Resource Management
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
LAF	Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten [State Office for Refugee Affairs]
LAGeSo	Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales [State Office for Health and Social Affairs]
MSI	Multi Stakeholder Initiative
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PM	Public Management
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
PSM	Public Service Motivation
RDC	Resident District Commissioner
SJT	Situational Judgement Test
UN	United Nations
URCS	Uganda Red Cross Society

Overview of Dissertation Articles

Article	Current State	Impact Factor 2020/21	VHB Jourqual3 Ranking	Conference Presentations / Workshops
I: Seidemann, I. & Weißmüller, K. S. (2022): Conceptual Foundations of Workforce Homogeneity in the Public Sector. Insights from a Systematic Review on Causes, Consequences, and Blind Spots, <i>Public Management Review</i> , https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2022.2084770	Published	6.004	B	- 81 st Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management, 2021 (Virtual Colloquium)
II: Seidemann, I.: A Journey to the Upside Down: Challenging the Paradox Debate in Organization Studies through Problematization Submitted with: <i>Organization Theory</i>	Under Review (1 st Round Revise and Resubmit)	n/a	n/a	- 37 th EGOS Colloquium, 2021, Amsterdam (Virtual Colloquium) - 81 st Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management, 2021 (Virtual Colloquium)
III: Seidemann, I. & Geiger, D.: Caught in a Trap: Media's Role in the Co-Creation of a Paradox of Legitimacy Repair Submitted with: <i>Journal of Applied Behavioral Science</i>	Under Review (2 nd Round Revise and Resubmit)	2,325	B	- 36 th EGOS Colloquium, 2020, Hamburg (Virtual Colloquium) [Nomination Best Student Paper Award] - 80 th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management, 2020, Vancouver (Virtual Colloquium) - 82 nd Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management, 2022, Seattle
IV: Seidemann, I., Geiger, D. & Harborth, L.: Nobody Said It Was Easy – System Level Dynamics in the Emergence and Navigation of Multi-Actor Paradoxes	Published as Best Paper in the Proceedings of the Eighty-third Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management	n/a	n/a	- 38 th EGOS Colloquium, PDW “Paradox Theory for Research in an Imperfect Society”, 2022, Vienna - EUFORPP Discussion and Development Workshop, 2022 (Virtual Workshop) - 83 rd Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management, 2023, Boston

Synopsis

1 Introduction

Increasing complexity, ambiguity and entanglements of institutional environments (Lewis & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2014) generate novel and oftentimes unpredictable challenges for organizations both in the private and the public sector. Organizations face conflicting goals and competing demands at the team and organizational level (Calabretta, Gemser, & Wijnberg, 2017; Fredberg, 2014; Smith & Lewis, 2011) and are increasingly confronted with complex and wicked problems at the interorganizational- and system level (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, Chalkias, & Cacciatori, 2022; Reinecke & Ansari, 2016; Schrage & Rasche, 2021). Current developments and crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine or the increase in climate-induced disasters and refugee movements amplify tensions, trigger resource scarcity and frequently render latent conflicts salient (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi, 2016; Howard-Grenville, 2021; Keller et al., 2021).

At the organizational and team level, organizations face tensions which range from conflicts between autonomy and control (Haas, 2010; Sewell & Taskin, 2015), diversity and homogeneity (Bassett-Jones, 2005; Seidemann & Weißmüller, 2022), exploitation and exploration (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Smith & Tushman, 2005) to tensions between stability and change (Rosales, Gaim, Berti, & Cunha, 2022; Sutton-Brady, 2008). Zooming out to the interorganizational- and system level, organizations experience tensions between conflicting forms of legitimacy (Haack & Rasche, 2021), tensions between competing social-market demands (Iivonen, 2017; Sharma & Bansal, 2017), competition versus cooperation (Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018; Jarzabkowski & Bednarek, 2017), local versus global (Schrage & Rasche, 2021; Tracey & Creed, 2017) as well as conflicting temporal orientations (Slawinski & Bansal, 2015; Slawinski, Pinkse, Busch, & Banerjee, 2017).

Current research in the organization and management literature not only indicates that organizations increasingly face unpredictable, complex and challenging tensions but further finds that organizations which recognize and address these tensions proactively, “will have the greatest hope of surviving and contributing to the world” (Smith, Lewis, & Tushman, 2016: 70). The objective of actively managing tensions shifts the scholarly focus to the development of organizational strategies and practices to respond to tensions and poses novel research questions about the consequences of tension management and the underlying boundary conditions and limitations (Schad, Lewis, & Smith, 2018).

Whereas, for decades, contingency theory has offered approaches to managing tensions arguing that organizations need to decide between competing demands by aligning with their external environment (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Woodward, 1970), more and more academics and practitioners adopt an alternative perspective by approaching tensions with a so-called ‘paradox lens’. Commonly, paradoxes are defined as “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time” (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 382). Paradox researchers hence not only recognize the contradictory element of tensions but examine the interrelation of opposing poles and how they are connected and intertwined (Smith & Lewis, 2022). Paradox research predominately promotes ‘embracing’ as the most effective way of handling contradictory poles (Quinn & Nujella, 2017: vi), which means engaging in ‘both/and’ instead of ‘either/or’ approaches, thereby overcoming the trade-off perspective known from contingency theory (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Accepting paradoxical tensions and valuing opposing poles simultaneously is found to lead to more sustainable solutions and to create positive outcomes for organizations, such as creativity, innovation and competitive advantages (Heracleous & Wirtz, 2014; Liu, Xu, & Zhang, 2020; Miron-Spektor, Ingram, Keller, Smith, & Lewis, 2018). Following this perspective, paradoxes do not merely represent challenges or obstacles for organizations but allow capable managers to harness their underlying potential (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Despite the fact that the paradox debate in organizational scholarship represents a rather young research area that has experienced its noticeable upswing from the 1990s on, its influence is constantly increasing (Cunha & Putnam, 2017). Researchers as well as practitioners apply the paradox lens not only to well-known fields of strategic tensions (Andriopoulous & Lewis, 2009; Smith & Tushman, 2005; Stadtler & van Wassenhove, 2016), but to tensions originating from phenomena of identity (Carollo & Guerici, 2017; Cuganesan, 2016), leadership (Knight & Paroutis, 2016; Zhang, Waldman, Han, & Li, 2015) or corporate social responsibility (Hahn, Pinkse, Preuss, & Figge, 2015; Iivonen, 2017; Ivory & Brooks, 2017). However, at the same time, the growing significance and proliferation of paradox research has created a complex and disperse research area, leading to a “lack of conceptual and theoretical coherence” (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 382). Some authors even raise concerns about the development of a “dominant logic, which will ultimately hinder conceptual development and result in its downfall” (Schad et al., 2018: 107). Increasingly, the debate becomes subject of centrifugal forces, challenging the theoretical underpinnings of paradox research.

Novel streams of paradox literature meanwhile take a more critical stance and start to question core assumptions of paradox theory such as the ability and power of actors to respond to paradoxes (Berti & Simpson, 2021; Ungureanu, Bertolotti, Mattarelli, & Bellesia, 2018), as well as the idea that paradox acceptance automatically leads to positive outcomes (Es-Sajjade, Pandza, & Volberda, 2021; Gaim, Clegg, & Cunha, 2021; Iivonen, 2017). Furthermore, drawing attention to the relevance and explanatory power of paradoxes in the context of wicked problems (Reinecke & Ansari, 2016) and grand challenges (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015), researchers shift their focus to interorganizational phenomena and zoom out to the system level (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, Chalkias, & Cacciatori, 2019; Schad & Bansal, 2018; Schrage & Rasche, 2021). Broadening the perspective sheds light on the emergence of multi-actor paradoxes which frequently involve a multitude of stakeholders from different sectors and institutional backgrounds (Jarzabkowski et al., 2022). Paradoxical tensions that reach beyond organizational boundaries and countries and thus exceed individual management, pose new challenges to organizations and provide novel insights into why tackling grand challenges and engaging in collective action approaches frequently fails or causes unintended consequences (Couture, Jarzabkowski, & Lê, 2022). Building on this body of literature, the following research questions guide my dissertation:

R1: How do (multi-actor) paradoxes emerge and develop in the context of complex societal challenges?

R2: How do organizations address and practice these paradoxical tensions?

Steered by these research questions, the dissertation contains four academic research articles. Article I (“Conceptual Foundations of Workforce Homogeneity in the Public Sector. Insights from a Systematic Review on Causes, Consequences, and Blind Spots”) presents a systematic literature review focusing on the complex relation of the opposing poles of homogeneity and diversity in public sector workforce. Addressing the societal challenge of representative bureaucracy (Clark, Ochs, & Frazier, 2013; Meier, 2019), the article problematizes the equation of homogeneity with non-diversity, thereby revealing paradoxical effects and unintended consequences of public personnel management. Since more and more public sector organizations worldwide promote diversity and inclusion policies (OECD, 2021), the article promotes a critical reflection on the mere positive interpretation of this diversity agenda to prevent inefficiency and to shed light on unanswered questions and contradictions that need to be addressed conceptually and empirically. Article II (“A Journey to the Upside Down: Challenging the Paradox Debate in Organization Studies through Problematization”) is a

conceptual paper and contributes to the rapidly developing paradox debate by questioning the general assumptions underlying the scholarly discourse. Building on the method of problematization (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, 2020), the paper identifies central assumptions in the paradox discourse and develops alternative viewpoints that challenge taken-for-granted perspectives. The construction of contrasting assumptions allows posing new research questions that aim at extending and developing the future paradox research agenda. Article III (“Caught in a Trap: Media’s Role in the Co-Creation of a Paradox of Legitimacy Repair”) empirically addresses the ‘dark side’ of the paradox debate by focusing on the paradoxical nature of legitimacy repair. Explaining the persistent legitimacy loss of a highly institutionalized organization, the paper illuminates how the media, together with internal and external stakeholders, were co-constructing paradoxical tensions which impeded legitimacy repair. The article argues that paradoxes can be co-constructed by multiple actors and hence addressing them may exceed the capability of managers and focal organizations. Article IV (“Nobody Said It Was Easy – System Level Dynamics in the Emergence and Navigation of Multi-Actor Paradoxes”) presents a longitudinal ethnography on the implementation of the ‘Forecast-based Financing’ approach in Uganda, an approach that aims at initiating early action in anticipation of disasters. The article takes a system level perspective to study how system level dynamics initiate and drive multi-actor paradoxes in the response to the grand challenge of climate-induced disasters. The paper reveals how multiple actors engage in contradictory yet interrelated practices that fuel paradoxical dynamics and finally create a non-optimal but stable equilibrium. The article suggests engaging more strongly with the critical potential of paradox theory (Berti & Cunha, 2022) by demonstrating that it is not the inertia of actors that fuels paradoxical dynamics but the purposive enactment of practices to address tensions that inhibits system change.

By investigating how paradoxical tensions emerge at different levels and how they pose complex, often wicked challenges to organizations that aim at addressing them, this dissertation contributes to the literature on organization and management studies – in particular to paradox theory and the scholarly discourse on grand challenges – in four ways. First, the dissertation adds to extant paradox literature by problematizing taken-for-granted assumptions and by developing novel perspectives that have the potential to push paradox theory beyond its current limitations (Cunha & Putnam, 2017; Schad et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2022). Second, the dissertation provides new empirical insights into the ‘dark sides’ of paradoxes (Berti & Simpson, 2021; Gaim et al., 2021; Ungureanu et al., 2018), triggers of vicious circles, and the creation of paradox traps that hinder organizations from successfully managing tensions. Third,

bridging paradox theory and a system level perspective generates novel findings on how paradoxical tensions emerge beyond organizational boundaries and how the interplay of paradoxes may cause non-optimal but path-dependent equilibria. These insights further contribute to the debate on grand challenges and wicked problems (Howard-Grenville, 2021; Jarzabkowski et al., 2022; Reinecke & Ansari, 2016) by fostering the understanding why tackling complex societal challenges that demand the engagement of multiple actors frequently fail or even lead to unintended consequences (Couture et al., 2022). Fourth, from a methodological perspective, the dissertation contributes to practice theory (Jarzabkowski et al., 2019; Kremser & Sydow, 2022; Nicolini, 2009, 2013) by highlighting how organizations engage in practices and strategies to address large-scale problems which, in isolation, seem purposive but constitute paradoxes when conceptualized as nexuses of practices at a higher level of analysis.

The dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter 2 presents the theoretical background of paradox research, Chapter 3 provides a summary of all four articles, Chapter 4 presents the theoretical and practical contributions of the dissertation, and Chapter 5 addresses the dissertation's limitations and develops an outlook and avenues for future research. Finally, the full versions of all four research articles (I-IV) follow.

2 Theoretical Background

The theoretical background of this dissertation builds on paradox theory and organizations' handling of tensions that indicate the elements of contradiction, interrelation and persistence (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 382). To structure the disperse and increasingly complex body of literature (Bednarek, Cunha, Schad, & Smith, 2021; Smith, Jarzabkowski, Lewis, & Langley, 2017), I summarize the ontological underpinnings of paradox theory and highlight their epistemological implications (2.1), explain the exposure and management of paradoxes (2.2), and finally, provide a critical overview of current limitations and research gaps (2.3).

2.1 The Definition and Ontology of Paradox

Since the late 1980s, management scholars have recognized organizations as sites of paradoxical tensions (Poole & van de Ven, 1989; Quinn & Cameron, 1988) and have built a coherent conceptual core (Schad, Lewis, Raisch, & Smith, 2016) which centers around the definition of paradoxes as “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time” (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 382). Despite the wide acceptance of this definition, critical scholars comment on the “fuzziness” of the concept (Berti & Cunha, 2022: 1).

Frequently, scholars, especially outsiders to paradox theory, criticize that tensions between, for instance, short- and long-term performances, autonomy and control or between social and financial goals present optimization problems and do not necessarily manifest as absurd or irrational (Lewis, 2000: 760). The rather broad definition, which builds on the conditions of contradiction, interrelation and persistence, allows to conceptualize a multitude of tensions as paradoxical, leading to “endless debates between authors and reviewers, or between paradox researchers and other organizational scholars, on whether or not an observed tension is actually a paradox” (Berti & Cunha, 2022: 2). Despite the increasing efforts to clarify and narrow down the concept of paradox by, for example, demarcating paradoxes from dialectics, trade-offs and dilemmas (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016) or by adding further conditions such as ‘undecidability’ (Berti & Cunha, 2022), the majority of paradox scholars sticks to the core definition by Smith and Lewis (2011), which therefore constitutes the basis of this dissertation.

Notwithstanding the wide acceptance of paradoxes as contradictory yet interrelated and persistent elements, the ontology of paradoxes is still contested. The argument evolves around the question if paradoxes are “intrinsic to group life or [...] a social construction” (Quinn & Nujella, 2017: 7). The former idea that paradoxes present innate features of organizing and exist outside of individual agency or recognition focuses on paradoxes as “living within systems, structures, processes, and routines” (Smith et al., 2017: 4). Following this perspective, paradoxes are a natural quality of human existence. In contrast, the assumption of paradoxes as a social construction relies on the idea that paradoxical tensions emerge “through the perception, language, and the behavior of individuals and collectives” (Schad, 2017: 36). This perspective therefore focuses on actors’ perception of the relation of opposing elements, their polarization, the influence of cognitive frames, sense making as well as contradicting norms and values (Michaud, 2014; Smith, 2014). Combining both views, Smith and Lewis (2011: 388) argue that “opposing yet interrelated dualities are embedded in the process of organizing and are brought into juxtaposition via environmental conditions”. The perspective that paradoxes are inherent in systems *and* socially constructed at the same time is considered to be one of the “paradoxes of paradox” (Smith et al., 2017: 1). Even though the reconciliation of these contrasting ontological perspectives constitutes a true ‘both/and’ approach, the blending of ontological assumptions is not unproblematic. Schad (2017: 37) hence explains that “conceptualizing tensions as socially constructed or systemically inherent leads to very different research questions”.

The ontological understanding of paradox has severe epistemological consequences and influences ‘doing paradox research’. Paradox studies apply a large variety of research methods

such as action research (Pradies, Tunarosa, Lewis, & Courtois, 2020), longitudinal case studies (Heracleous & Wirtz, 2014), or surveys and scales (Keller, Loewenstein, & Yan, 2017; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). Regardless of the chosen method, the majority of literature assumes that researchers are generally able to identify and observe paradoxes. However, Andriopoulous and Gotsi (2017) argue that the researcher needs to reflect on the question who experiences or thinks the paradox – the scholar or the subjects under study. Assuming that paradoxes are inherent to the world, a researcher would need to account for the observation of contradictory but interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and are persistent (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The researcher then projects the paradox into an empirical setting, even though the participants may not necessarily recognize the observation as paradoxical. In contrast, assuming that paradoxes are socially constructed, researchers would need to study their research subjects' paradoxical awareness, hence concentrating on the processes and practices by which individuals come to the perception of paradoxical tensions in the social world.

In order to understand the emergence and (co-)construction of paradoxes, this dissertation takes a practice approach (Nicolini, 2009, 2013). Focusing on practices as “meaning-making, order-producing, and reality-shaping activities” (Nicolini, 2013: 6), the dissertation conceptualizes paradoxes as socially constructed phenomena thus acknowledging the perception of individuals and collectives, the role of language as well as the emergence, socialization and institutionalization of practices.

2.2 The Exposure and Management of Paradox

Until today, Smith and Lewis' (2011) dynamic equilibrium model of organizing presents the 'core manual' on how organizations recognize paradoxes and how they are supposed to engage with them. It is commonly assumed that paradoxical tensions are generally invisible to actors – they are “dormant, unperceived, or ignored” (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 390). The paradox literature hence argues that only the occurrence of specific environmental conditions or cognitive abilities makes the contradicting, interrelated elements visible (Knight & Paroutis, 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Once paradoxes have been made salient, actors have different options how to respond to them. The first option describes defensive mechanisms such as repression and denial of the paradox leading into vicious circles (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The alternative presents the accepting and embracing of paradoxes fueling virtuous circles. Smith and Lewis (2011: 392) argue that paradox acceptance “provides a comfort with tensions that enables more complex and challenging resolution strategies”. Empirical studies support this argument by finding that individuals who successfully engage with paradoxes are more

creative, innovative and perform better (Calabretta et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2020; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Schneider, Bullinger, & Brandl, 2020). On the organizational level, research highlights positive outcomes such as competitive advantages (Fredberg, 2014; Heracleous & Wirtz, 2014), the initiation of change (Fredberg, 2014; Jay, 2013) as well as successful collaborations (Sharma & Bansal, 2017). Summarizing, the main body of paradox literature assumes that embracing paradoxes successfully enables organizations to grow and learn, and finally to enact sustainable and resilient solutions (Smith & Lewis, 2011; Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996).

Whereas the vast majority of empirical findings (e.g., Heracleous & Wirtz, 2014; Ivory & Brooks, 2017; Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017; Jay, 2013; Schneider et al., 2020; Törner, Pousette, Larsman, & Hemlin, 2016) supports the key assumptions underlying the dynamic equilibrium model (Smith & Lewis, 2011), more and more critical voices enter the discourse introducing the perspective of 'dark sides' of paradoxes (Berti & Simpson, 2021; Gaim et al., 2021; Iivonen, 2017; Ungureanu et al., 2018). These critical voices raise concerns about the neglected aspect of power (Berti & Simpson, 2021) and question core assumptions such as the superiority of 'both/and' approaches (Cunha & Putnam, 2017).

2.3 Limitations and 'Dark Sides' of Paradox

One of the core aspects of criticism among paradox scholars evolves around the neglected question of power in the process of paradox management (Putnam et al., 2016; Wenzel, Koch, Cornelissen, Rothmann, & Senf, 2019). Berti and Cunha (2022) argue that power affects paradox theory in at least three ways. First, exposing paradoxes and rendering them salient – or keeping them invisible by purpose – is subject to power relations. Second, the authors question the assumption that actors are always able to respond to paradoxes in a productive way. Berti and Simpson (2021: 261) argue that due to material conditions such as resource access or hierarchical disparities, individuals frequently lack the option to respond to paradoxes in a legitimate way. Third, power dynamics influence the choice of the strategy how to respond to the paradox since different stakeholders have different intentions and preferences how to deal with a certain field of tension (Berti & Cunha, 2022: 16). Following their argument, these aspects come to effect particularly in contexts of interorganizational collaboration and collective action approaches when a multitude of stakeholders with different backgrounds and agendas come together (Dentoni, Bitzer, & Schouten, 2018; Gray, Purdy, & Ansari, 2022; Jarzabkowski et al., 2022) and constitute a significant limitation of current paradox theory.

Next to the aspect of power, scholars begin to question the ideal of ‘both/and’ approaches as a panacea for handling paradoxes. Cunha and Putnam (2017: 97) criticize the dualism of ‘either/or’ and ‘both/and’ approaches in general, arguing that “[i]n some cases, effective responses to contradictory demands entail a combination of either-or, both-and, and more-than approaches”. Moreover, tackling complex problems such as grand challenges frequently requires clear responsibilities and orchestration that rely on ‘either/or’ decisions (Ferraro et al., 2015). A related concern derives from the assumption that successful paradox management creates sustainable equilibria which tame paradoxes in virtuous circles. Whereas Smith and Lewis (2011) argue that actors’ acceptance of and comfort with tensions enables them to overcome the vicious and absurd forces of paradox, scholars increasingly criticize that the dynamic equilibrium model neglects the unpredictability of paradoxes (Weiser & Laamanen, 2022) and underestimates the role of disequilibrium in successful paradox management (Jarzabkowski et al., 2022).

Finally, Schad and Bansal (2018) warn that the perspective of isolated paradoxes that unfold in single organizations or demarcated realms simplifies organizational realities and masks the underlying roots of tensions. Taking a system perspective, they argue that scholars and practitioners tend to focus on perceived tensions within a specific empirical context but ignore the underlying complexity of nested, latent tensions harbored at the macro level. Following their argument, paradox scholars hence focus on the trees but not the forest. Particularly when dealing with wicked problems (Reinecke & Ansari, 2016) which are characterized by complex dynamics entailing multiple tensions across levels of analysis, paradox theory still lacks conceptual as well as methodological approaches to account for the ‘scaling of paradox’. Organizations may thus engage in practices to address grand challenges which, in isolation, seem purposive but lead to unintended and paradoxical effects when conceptualized as nexuses of practices at a higher level of analysis (Kremser & Sydow, 2022). Summarizing, these critical thoughts call for an increase in complexity within paradox research and stress the importance of considering the system level which raises novel questions on how to scale paradox theory.

Recognizing and engaging with these current limitations of paradox theory, this dissertation aims at responding to the raised issues and questions in four different research articles. In the following, I summarize these four articles and present their theoretical grounding, their research question(s), their respective methods as well as the main findings and contributions of each article.

3 Summary of Articles

Article I: Conceptual Foundations of Workforce Homogeneity in the Public Sector. Insights from a Systematic Review on Causes, Consequences, and Blind Spots

During the last two decades, workforce diversity has gained increasing attention in public management research (Dudau & McAllister, 2010; Lee & Zhang, 2021; Moon & Christensen, 2020) pointing towards a looming “diversity crisis” in public workforces across the globe (Linos, 2018: 67). Yet, the expected retirement waves of senior public sector workers present a “unique opportunity to diversify the public sector by increasing the share of underrepresented groups” (Wolf & Amirkhanyan, 2010: 19), thereby contributing to addressing societal challenges such as inequality and discrimination (Meier, 2019). Public management scholarship recognizes that modern societies are increasingly diverse and that the representation of as many groups of society is essential for sustaining institutional legitimacy, inclusive procedural justice, and citizen trust (Dudau & McAllister, 2010; Riccucci & Saidel, 1997). The concept of diversity hence holds a prominent role in public management scholarship on this objective of bureaucratic representation (Clark et al., 2013) as well as in the general management literature on the relationship between equal opportunities in HR and organizational performance (Kochan et al., 2003; Wright, Ferris, Hiller, & Kroll, 1995). However, the topic of what actually constitutes ‘workforce diversity’ (or lack thereof) is still lacking conceptual clarity in public management research despite the growing societal and scholarly interest (Pitts & Wise, 2010).

Cox (1995) defines ‘diversity’ as a multidimensional composite of human differences but studies on diversity are inconclusive and frequently non-transparent as to which dimensions to include conceptually (Kennedy, 2014). Whereas dimensions such as age, gender, or ethnicity are tangible, scholars stress that diversity also incorporates intangible dimensions, such as “differences in worldviews or subjective culture” (Larkey, 1996: 465). Combining these perspectives, Inegbedion et al. (2020: 2) define workforce diversity as “the differences in employees because of the coming together of people from various backgrounds”, whereby diverse backgrounds stem from “the heterogeneous nature of people due to certain dimensions, especially gender, race, ethnicity, personality, and culture”. Besides lacking clarity concerning the scope of the concept of diversity, empirical studies struggle to provide a tangible link between diversity and measurable outcomes. Many studies rely on singular, predominantly tangible dimensions and conclude with partially contradicting findings and multi-directional relationships between causes and consequences of workforce composition (Linos, 2018; Pitts & Wise, 2010; Selden & Selden, 2001). Addressing this ambiguity, Apfelbaum, Phillips, and Richeson (2014) conclude that it is hardly possible to make any final scientific statements

concerning the value of workforce diversity yet, clearly calling the current concept into question. The existence of contradictory empirical results as well as the prevalence of research focusing on tangible diversity dimensions points towards a gap in our theoretical understanding of diversity and calls for a more critical perspective.

Responding to this gap, the study problematizes (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011) the limitations and unquestioned normativity that underlies the diversity discourse. Systematically addressing the elusive concept of homogeneity and its (inter)relation to diversity, the article poses the questions *“How is the concept of public sector workforce homogeneity conceptualized in the scholarly discourse? What are the causes and consequences of public sector workforce homogeneity?”*. Aiming at synthesizing the empirical evidence accrued on the concept of workforce homogeneity in the public sector, the study presents a qualitative meta-synthetic approach analyzing 31 public management articles. The study builds on the ‘Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses’ (PRISMA) approach (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009) to structure and report the search strategy and subsequent steps of analysis.

The systematic review finds that the scientific discourse revolves around three clusters of causes that explain the emergence and stickiness of workforce homogeneity (self-selection, personnel policies, and socialization processes) and distills four clusters of consequences encompassing both desired and undesired effects of homogeneity (groupthink, lack of neutrality and representation, employee wellbeing and performance, and rigidity). Building on these findings, the study sheds new light on the interrelation between homogeneity and diversity. Integrating the perspective of homogeneity not merely as the flipside of diversity but as an independent concept into the discourse on workforce composition in the public sector allows to better understand the complex relation of both poles. Applying these insights can help to tackle inequality and discrimination and to enhance the implementation of representation in practice. Since more and more public sector organizations worldwide promote diversity and inclusion policies (OECD, 2021) it is equally important for practitioners to critically reflect on the mere positive interpretation of this diversity agenda to prevent inefficiency or unintended effects. Finally, this study represents a first step in addressing the paradoxical findings in the diversity discourse such as, for instance, the promotion of white women at the expense of reinforcing the discrimination of women of color, challenging an often taken-for-granted entanglement of theoretical concepts and terminology.

Article II: A Journey to the Upside Down: Challenging the Paradox Debate in Organization Studies through Problematization

Recording its noticeable upswing from the 1990s, paradox research has flourished and became an integral part in organization and management studies. Paradoxes are considered to be ubiquitous, “a pervasive characteristic of organizational life” (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017: 386), and its management the “ultimate advantage and challenge for organizations” (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009: 709). However, at the same time, the growing significance and proliferation has contributed to an increasingly diverse research field, leading to a “lack of conceptual and theoretical coherence” (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 382). Some authors even raise concerns about the development of a “dominant logic, which will ultimately hinder conceptual development” (Schad et al., 2018: 107) and argue that the success of paradox theory might lead into path dependence (Cunha & Putnam, 2017).

Addressing these growing concerns, it is the aim of the article to foster theoretical development by engaging in a rather critical and provocative way of theorizing (Cornelissen, Höllerer, & Seidl, 2021). The practice of emancipatory theorizing (see, e.g., Janssens & Zanon, 2021; Spicer, 2020) recognizes “the historical and social nature of our theoretical knowledge” (Cornelissen et al., 2021: 11) and aims at revealing dominant structures within a distinct area of research. Building on the methodology of the problematization approach (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011), the article differentiates between in-house assumptions, root metaphor assumptions, paradigmatic assumptions, ideology assumptions, and field assumptions. Following, the article focuses on three key areas of assumptions within the paradox discourse referring to the ontology of paradoxes, their exposure and management as well as the perceived superiority of ‘both/and’ approaches.

First, discussing the conflicting ontological perspectives on paradoxes as inherent features of organizational life or social constructions, the article develops implications and consequences of both understandings. For instance, perceiving paradoxes as socially constructed raises the question why actors frame tensions as paradoxes and how they create the impression of contradiction, interrelatedness, and persistence. However, conceptualizing paradoxes as inherent organizational phenomena shifts the attention to practices actors apply to shift away paradoxes temporally, spatially or along organizational levels. Second, focusing on the management of paradoxes, the assumption of paradox acceptance and embracing as the ultimate response to handling tensions is scrutinized. Highlighting the neglected role and limited capabilities of actors, the process of problematization raises the questions how paradox embracing at the organizational level may harm employees at the individual level, and how

paradoxes may get out of actors' control. Third, questioning the assumption of the superiority of 'both/and' solutions reveals the approach's limitations and potential risks, particularly when transferring the paradox lens to different research areas. For instance, reconciling contradictions at any cost may repress conflict and disagreement which raises the question how 'both/and' approaches can result in an enforced settlement of conflict and even lead to competitive disadvantages.

Addressing the taken-for-granted beliefs underlying the paradox discourse contributes to the future development of paradox theory in three ways. First, challenging relevant assumptions is crucial since they not only inform the debate but at the same time are constantly reproduced by the literature thus creating unquestioned narratives and blind spots. Second, scrutinizing key assumptions allows to develop contrasting perspectives and to construct novel research questions that aim at reforming and extending the future research agenda of paradox theory. Third, besides carving out an alternative research agenda, the article stresses the importance of a transparent communication of assumptions and the self-reflection of scholars which is essential when comparing findings and evaluating research gaps.

Article III: Caught in a Trap: Media's Role in the Co-Creation of a Paradox of Legitimacy Repair

Increasing complexity and ambiguity within institutional environments (Lewis & Smith, 2014) renders the maintenance and (re)creation of organizational legitimacy more challenging (Kostova & Zaheer, 1999). De Vaujany (2019: 219) argues that the fragility of organizations' legitimacy has "made legitimation itself more open, more emotional and more problematic", hence shifting scholarly attention towards the problematic processes of legitimacy repair (Budd, Kelsey, Mueller, & Whittle, 2018; Siltaoja & Vehkaperä, 2009). Literature on legitimacy repair not only focusses on specific repair strategies (Bachmann & Ingenhoff, 2016; Linsley & Kajuter, 2008; Long, 2016; Radtke & Fleischer, 2019; Wang, 2010) but increasingly acknowledges the role of media in repair attempts (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Deephouse & Suchman, 2013). Despite the far-reaching consequences of failing legitimacy repair such as the ultimate death of an organization (Hamilton, 2006; Sutton, 1987; Sutton & Callahan, 1987), relatively little is known about the active role of media in the creation of obstacles and tensions within the process of (failing) legitimacy repair (Suddaby, Bitektine, & Haack, 2017: 462). In order to better understand the emergence of tensions that organizations aiming at repairing legitimacy have to deal with, research on organizational legitimacy recently started referring to paradox theory (Haack & Rasche, 2021).

Whereas paradox scholars argue that organizations dealing with paradoxical tensions need to accept and embrace these tensions (Fredberg, 2014; Smith & Lewis, 2011), recent work on the ‘dark sides’ of paradoxes finds that actors are frequently unable to embrace tensions successfully due to power imbalances between the affected actors (Berti & Simpson, 2021). Combining insights from the influence of media on legitimacy repair processes and paradox theory shifts our attention first of all, to the role of media in repair processes and second, to the emergence of complex tensions within legitimacy repair. Building on these insights, the study asks *“What is the role of media as a powerful actor in (failing) legitimacy repair processes and how do paradoxical tensions emerge and evolve within such a process?”*.

The article presents an empirical case study of (failing) legitimacy repair, using the example of the State Office for Health and Social Affairs in Berlin (LAGeSo) during the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015. The case of LAGeSo describes one of the worst crises a German authority has ever suffered and has become a symbol of authority failure not only in Germany but worldwide. To better understand why legitimacy repair failed and the role of media in this process, the study builds on the analysis of 527 newspaper articles that report about the legitimacy crisis and LAGeSo’s attempts to repair its legitimacy. The findings show how the media and internal as well as external stakeholders co-construct two paradoxical tensions: the internal transformation paradox, and the external transformation paradox. By first framing a specific problem the organization needs to address and then framing the solution to this problem as the source of new problems, the media co-construct paradoxical tensions which the organization finds impossible to escape.

First, these findings contribute to better understanding the role of media in failing legitimacy repair processes which goes beyond the perspective of media as passive spectators towards conceptualizing media as active ‘failing agents’. The study further shows that the object of legitimacy does not constitute a stable entity but is constantly changing as the result of the legitimacy repair process. Second, the article contributes to paradox research by showing how paradoxical tensions can be co-constructed by powerful external actors and stakeholders that may even trap organizations into vicious circles. These insights reveal that paradoxes which are co-created by multiple actors cannot be successfully addressed by one actor alone. This can explain why the successful embracing of paradoxes, as current paradox research suggests, is often not feasible and paradoxical tensions persist.

Article IV: Nobody Said It Was Easy – System Level Dynamics in the Emergence and Navigation of Multi-Actor Paradoxes

While it is expected that the impacts of climate change will drastically increase over the upcoming decades, its latent effects such as food insecurity and violent conflicts are already leading to the displacement of millions of people every year, further intensifying humanitarian crises across the world (Schneider, Radtke, & Weller, 2021). These immediate as well as medium- and long-term effects of climate-induced disasters qualify as ‘grand challenges’, large-scale problems with far-reaching societal implications characterized by being uncertain, complex, and evaluative (Ferraro et al., 2015). Whereas grand challenges are conceptualized as critical barriers that need to be removed to generate positive change (George et al., 2016), research points out that addressing them confronts actors with inseparable and co-occurring tensions, frequently creating the perception of ‘wicked problems’ (Reinecke & Ansari, 2016). Such tensions range from competing social-market demands (Iivonen, 2017; Sharma & Bansal, 2017), competition versus cooperation (Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018; Jarzabkowski & Bednarek, 2017), local versus global (Schrage & Rasche, 2021; Tracey & Creed, 2017) to conflicting temporal orientations (Slawinski & Bansal, 2015; Slawinski et al., 2017).

In recent years, paradox theory has started to shed light on the question how organizations and their members cope with such tensions, i.e., with elements that are contradictory yet interrelated and persistent (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 382). The paradox literature predominantly argues that paradoxes need to be actively embraced to create long-term sustainability and equilibrium, which means both to differentiate between and to integrate conflicting poles (Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). The paradox literature also finds that defensive approaches to paradoxes such as prioritizing one pole over the other lead to vicious circles and produce wrecking ball effects (Smith & Lewis, 2022: 57). Whereas paradox theory thus provides guidance on how organizations and managers should approach and handle paradoxes, grand challenges involve inseparable and co-occurring tensions that reach beyond single organizations or even countries (Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016). Paradoxical tensions that persist at the system level and typically characterize grand challenges (Cunha & Putnam, 2017; Schad & Bansal, 2018), constitute multi-actor problems and hence go beyond the perspective of isolated paradoxes unfolding inside single organizations (Jarzabkowski et al., 2022). When acknowledging the influence of the interactions of multiple actors at the system level, it is crucial to consider system dynamics and its role in addressing paradoxical tensions. In order to understand how grand challenges can be tackled we need to better understand how paradoxes emerge and interact on the system level.

The article hence poses the research question “*How do system level dynamics initiate and drive multi-actor paradoxes and how do these dynamics influence paradox navigation?*”. The study explores this research question in the context of the implementation of the ‘Forecast-based Financing’ (FbF) approach, a funding mechanism that aims at providing humanitarian aid organizations with financial and institutional capabilities to act in anticipation of disasters. The FbF mechanism was initiated by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and rolled out at the level of the National Societies like the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS). Whereas the URCS has the implementation mandate for FbF, the success of the approach depends on the engagement of key stakeholders including the IFRC, local governments, local URCS branches as well as the disaster-affected communities. Taking a practice lens, the article builds on an ethnographic field study following the FbF implementation alongside the involvement of key actors over a time period of more than three years.

The study reveals that the key stakeholders engage in practices that fuel contradictory yet interrelated system dynamics. At the system level, these dynamics drive two main paradoxical dynamics: ‘knowing more and doing less’ and ‘doing more and knowing less’. First, the article shows how these dynamics emerge and how they create self-reinforcing dynamics. Second, it explains how these dynamics stabilize each other, thus creating a non-optimal, path-dependent equilibrium. The article thereby contributes to research on grand challenges by exploring why the attempt to trigger system change presents such a difficult and wicked endeavor and oftentimes fails or produces unintended consequences. Furthermore, the article contributes to paradox theory by introducing a dynamic perspective and by conceptualizing paradoxes as contradictory yet interrelated dynamics that emerge at the system level and cannot be addressed by a single organization.

4 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

In this dissertation, I analyze how paradoxical tensions emerge and develop in the context of complex societal challenges and how organizations address these tensions, particularly when tensions go beyond organizational boundaries. The dissertation provides insights into how paradoxical tensions unfold and manifest in practices within organizations (Article I), in relation to external stakeholders (Article III) and within collective action approaches (Article IV). Moreover, the dissertation facilitates the understanding why organizations fail in managing tensions successfully (Article III, IV) and highlights boundary conditions of paradox management and novel avenues for research (Article II). In addition to the specific contributions

mentioned in the respective articles, I summarize three overarching theoretical contributions to the literature as well as the practical implications and relevance of this dissertation.

First, the dissertation contributes to extending and deepening the discourse about the ‘dark sides’ of paradox theory (Berti & Cunha, 2022; Berti & Simpson, 2021; Iivonen, 2017). So far, the debate predominately focuses on conceptual work on the limitations of paradox theory and neglected aspects, such as power and agency (Berti & Cunha, 2022; Berti & Simpson, 2021; Weiser & Laamanen, 2022). This dissertation gains empirical insights into the limitations of paradox management by highlighting how paradoxes can be co-constructed by different internal and external stakeholders of organizations (Article III). These findings extend the argument of actors frequently lacking resources to respond to paradoxes (Berti & Simpson, 2021) by showing that, despite existing resources, actors may fail in addressing paradoxes when the paradox is co-created and therefore addressing it is beyond the scope of the focal organization. Furthermore, the dissertation highlights that paradoxes can become persistent and almost impossible to tackle if they are subject to self-reinforcing dynamics that stabilize the paradoxes at the system level in a path-dependent manner (Article IV). These findings further help to bridge the ‘dark sides’ of paradox debate and the literature on path dependence (Kremser & Sydow, 2022; Schreyögg & Sydow, 2011; Wenzel, 2015) opening novel avenues for theoretical development.

Second, the dissertation contributes to reconceptualizing the current concept of paradox and moving towards a more processual and dynamic understanding. Defining paradoxes as stable poles that imply contradiction, interrelation and persistence (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 382) creates the impression of paradoxes as “things” that can be controlled by managers (Cunha & Putnam, 2017: 100). However, this dissertation questions the rather static perspective by arguing that it is often difficult to clearly define poles especially if they present rather elusive concepts of tensions (Article I). Conceptualizing paradoxes as a continuous (co-)creation process (Article III) highlights paradoxes as ‘constantly becoming’ (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Tuckermann, 2019) and supports novel insights that stress their dynamic nature (Weiser & Laamanen, 2022). Finally, the dissertation introduces the concept of paradoxical dynamics (Article IV) and shows how a nexus of practices forms paradoxical tensions at the system level. Understanding paradoxes as processes allows to move beyond the perspective of stable paradox poles that can be embraced and brings the wickedness of paradoxes to the fore. This perspective sets a counterpoint to the often rather ‘rosy’ picture of paradoxes as boosters of creativity and innovation (Liu et al., 2020; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018) and calls for novel strategies and responses to handle paradoxes.

Third, this dissertation contributes to the emerging field of grand challenges (Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016; Howard-Grenville, 2021). Whereas grand challenges are conceptualized as critical barriers that need to be removed to generate positive change (George et al., 2016), this dissertation explores why attempts to trigger system change present such difficult endeavors and oftentimes fail or lead to unintended consequences. Literature on grand challenges predominately argues that these complex and large-scale problems are too far reaching to be solved by single actors and that tackling them requires sharing capacities and collective solutions (Couture et al., 2022; Ferraro et al., 2015; Trist, 1983). Consequently, addressing grand challenges requires multi-stakeholder governance and involves collaboration and coordination between independent parties with different backgrounds and agendas (Huxham, Vangen, Huxham, & Eden, 2000; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Vangen & Huxham, 2003). This dissertation supports recent findings that raise concerns about the idea that multi-stakeholder initiatives present a panacea for solving grand challenges (Dentoni et al., 2018; Gray et al., 2022). Whereas contrasting perspectives and sector affiliation are frequently argued to impede collective action approaches (Ansari, Wijen, & Gray, 2013; Moog, Spicer, & Böhm, 2014; Zimmermann, Albers, & Kenter, 2021), this dissertation reveals that failure not necessarily results from the unwillingness of actors to engage in the approach or conflicting institutional backgrounds but the interplay of implementation practices at the system level. The dissertation thus contributes to the discourse on grand challenges by arguing that the failure to substantially tackle grand challenges is not only caused by the complexity of the problem at hand but strongly driven by the practices that aim at navigating the challenge thereby shifting the attention to the fact that “working together to mitigate grand challenges [...] becomes a challenge in itself” (Couture et al., 2022: 3).

Finally, these theoretical contributions also imply implications and recommendations for practitioners. First of all, this dissertation clearly highlights that paradox management presents a very challenging and sometimes even impossible task. These findings should not lead to the discouragement of managers or result in frustration and inertia but stress that tensions and conflict are often caused by systemic paradoxes that exceed individuals’ scope of action (Schad & Bansal, 2018). Whereas paradox scholars tend to emphasize the micro level and the importance of a paradox mindset and cognitive capacities to unpack and harness the potential of paradoxes (Knight & Paroutis, 2016; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018), this dissertation criticizes the simple distinction between ‘enlightened leaders’ and ‘less gifted ones’ who may even cause vicious circles due to their inability to embrace paradoxes (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Moreover, the dissertation shows how – despite best intentions and the will to trigger social change – tension management may lead to paradoxical and unintended consequences, for example pursuing diversity but actually fostering homogeneity (Seidemann & Weißmüller, 2022). Whereas successfully navigating tensions may indeed contribute to organizational sustainability and resilience and support the tackling of complex challenges, practitioners have to bear in mind that balancing opposing poles at any cost may foster the status-quo and finally impede system change.

5 Limitations and Future Research

This dissertation includes a set of limitations that at the same time have the potential to generate novel avenues for future research and methodological development.

A first methodological limitation stems from the dissertation's objective of linking scales to explore how paradoxes emerge and develop within the context of large-scale, global challenges. Whereas the dissertation focuses on specific empirical contexts such as the so-called 'German refugee crisis' in 2015 and the implementation of the 'Forecast-based Financing' approach in Uganda, these very local cases are connected to large-scale crises such as climate change and refugee movements, thus highlighting the interrelation of analytical scales. Taking a practice perspective and analyzing data by zooming in and zooming out (Jarzabkowski et al., 2019; Nicolini, 2013) allows to bridge levels and to "trail connections" (Nicolini, 2009: 1369). Whereas the approach allows the 'upscaling' from nexuses of practices to system dynamics and thus connects the local and global (Jarzabkowski et al., 2019; Kremser & Sydow, 2022), it also challenges traditional ways of analyzing and coding data (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012; Harrison & Rouse, 2014). Consequently, the dissertation raises methodical questions and encourages researchers to engage in creative and novel approaches to link scales especially in the context of large-scale, global phenomena.

Moreover, whereas the dissertation explicitly stresses the interconnection of levels and the knotted and nested nature tensions (Gaim et al., 2021; Jarzabkowski et al., 2022; Sheep, Fairhurst, & Khazanchi, 2016), the respective articles focus on specific levels of analysis such as the team- or system level. Isolating levels of observation and analysis reduces complexity but at the same time presents a significant limitation. Emphasizing the importance of multi-level approaches, future research could hence engage more strongly in taking a multi-level perspective on managing paradoxes and explore how individual managers perceive large-scale paradoxes in their every-day work context. In addition, it is crucial to investigate why tensions

that are salient at the system level frequently remain invisible at the individual or organizational level.

Finally, predominantly exploring the ‘dark sides’ of paradox, this dissertation is drawn to cases of failure and unsuccessful paradox management and hence only portrays one side of the coin. It is important to note that failure often reveals great insights into the underlying mechanisms of phenomena (Hamilton, 2006) and that organization and management literature “in general, tend to overemphasize the positive aspects and outcomes of organizational life” (MacLean & Behnam, 2010: 1517). However, despite contributing to the exploration of boundary conditions of paradox management, it is also highly relevant to further investigate how organizations successfully manage paradoxes – especially when organizations adopt alternative strategies other than the embracing of opposing poles. Consequently, future research should concentrate on how organizations that part from the recommended ‘both/and’ approach handle tensions successfully and why certain organizations may experience no paradoxes at all, focusing on organizational strategies to keep tensions latent.

In conclusion, this dissertation gains important insights and answers to specific areas of paradox theory but also generates novel questions and research gaps. Acknowledging these unsolved puzzles, the dissertation contributes to the future development of paradox theory and aims at providing various starting points to further challenge and develop our existing knowledge.

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Article I: Conceptual Foundations of Workforce Homogeneity in the Public Sector. Insights from a Systematic Review on Causes, Consequences, and Blind Spots

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Conceptual foundations of workforce homogeneity in the public sector. Insights from a systematic review on causes, consequences, and blind spots

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ABSTRACT

Workforce diversity is a key objective of public personnel policies worldwide. We augment this discourse by exploring the complementary and multifaceted concept of workforce *homogeneity*. This systematic literature review clarifies an elusive concept and reveals dominant causes and consequences of public sector workforce homogeneity, synthesizing how self-selection, personnel policies, and socialization create often implicit yet persistent practices that lead to workforce homogeneity. By linking these causes with their (un-)intended consequences, this study on workforce homogeneity sheds light on an important theoretical concept for public management and identifies broad avenues for future research.

KEYWORDS Workforce homogeneity; diversity; self-selection; public personnel management; systematic literature review

Introduction

During the last two decades, workforce diversity has gained increasing attention in public management (PM) research (Dudau and McAllister 2010; Lee and Zhang 2020; Moon and Christensen 2020; Vangen and Winchester 2014), pointing towards a looming ‘diversity crisis’ in public workforces across the globe (Linos 2018, 67). Fuelled by a shortage of talent in many areas of public service provision, public personnel managers are struggling to attract skilled staff into their relatively overaged workforce in all OECD countries (Colley 2014).¹ Yet, the expected retirement waves of senior public sector workers present a ‘unique opportunity to diversify the public sector by increasing the share of underrepresented groups’ (Wolf and Amirkhanyan 2010, 19), but why does public personnel composition matter?

Classic Weberian bureaucracy assumes that public personnel management systems transform recruited talent into rule-abiding bureaucrats who will fulfil their duty neutrally and efficiently (Weißmüller, De Waele, and van Witteloostuijn 2022). However, PM scholarship recognizes that modern societies are increasingly diverse and that the representation of as many groups of society – both by tangible and intangible characteristics – is essential for sustaining institutional legitimacy, inclusive procedural justice, and citizen trust (Riccucci and Saidel 1997; Hong 2021; Dudau and McAllister 2010). The concept of diversity holds a prominent role in PM scholarship on this objective of bureaucratic representation (Meier 2019; Clark, Ochs, and Frazier 2013) as well as in the general management literature on the relationship between equal opportunities in HR and organizational performance (Kochan et al. 2003; Wright et al. 1995; Li et al. 2018). However, the particularities of the public sector often impede direct transfer of scholarly insights from the general management literature into PM because public sector organizations operate in political environments that constrain employment regulations, they pursue dissimilar goals, and operate by dissimilar value frames compared with private sector organizations (Oberfield 2016; Nabatchi 2018). Consequently, the topic of what actually constitutes ‘workforce diversity’ (or lack thereof) is still lacking conceptual clarity in PM research despite the growing societal and scholarly interest (Pitts and Wise 2010).

Cox (1995) defines ‘diversity’ as a multidimensional composite of human differences but studies on diversity are inconclusive and frequently non-transparent as to which dimensions to include conceptually (Kennedy 2014). For instance, Wise and Tschirhart (2000) point out that diversity management mainly focused on the dimensions of age and gender while neglecting racial and ethnic diversity issues habitually. Whereas dimensions such as age, gender, or ethnicity are tangible, scholars stress that diversity also incorporates intangible dimensions, such as ‘differences in worldviews or subjective culture’ (Larkey 1996, 465). Combining these perspectives, Inegbedion et al. (2020, 2) define workforce diversity as ‘the differences in employees because of the coming together of people from various backgrounds’, whereby diverse backgrounds stem from ‘the heterogeneous nature of people due to certain dimensions, especially gender, race, ethnicity, personality, and culture’. In this sense, both tangible and intangible attributes, abilities, and characteristics constitute *diversity* (Jackson, May, and Whitney 1995). Besides lacking clarity concerning the scope of the concept of diversity, empirical studies struggle to provide a tangible, (quasi-)causal link between diversity and measurable outcomes. Many studies rely on singular, predominantly tangible dimensions and conclude with partially contradicting findings and multi-directional relationships between causes and consequences of workforce composition (Selden and Selden 2001; Pitts 2005; Linos 2018). Addressing this ambiguity, Apfelbaum, Phillips, and Richeson (2014) conclude that it is hardly possible to make any final scientific statements concerning the value of workforce diversity yet, clearly calling the current concept into question. This line of contradictory empirical results as well as the prevalence of research focusing on tangible diversity dimensions points towards a gap in our theoretical understanding of diversity and calls for a more critical perspective. Following Alvesson and Sandberg (2011), who stress that developing relevant theoretical insights requires engaging with alternative perspectives, we problematize the limitations and unquestioned normativity that underlies the diversity discourse by focusing on its (presumed) mirror concept *homogeneity* instead. This study’s goal is not to propose its own definition of homogeneity but to reveal how the concept is being used and conceptualized in the discourse and, subsequently, to synthesize the empirical evidence accrued on the causes and consequences of workforce homogeneity in the public sector. This is why we opted for a qualitative meta-synthetic approach that does not aim to empirically measure the level of homogeneity in the public sector (e.g. by quantitative means of meta-analysis) but to make a conceptual contribution that highlights a blind spot in the discourse on workforce composition. Applying these insights can help develop a deeper understanding of public sector workforce homogeneity and its relation to diversity as well as enhance the implementation of representation in practice. This study contributes to the public management discourse by revealing that homogeneity is often taken for granted as a theoretical concept although it is hardly defined. Reviewing the discourse on homogeneity promotes us to argue that homogeneity regarding tangible *and* intangible dimensions has independent causes and effects, which cannot be explained from a theoretical stance based on a (lack of) diversity conceptualization but deserves further scholarly attention.

The relationship between homogeneity and diversity

Workforce homogeneity is a surprisingly under-explored concept. To date, neither the growing number of studies on public sector diversity nor the empirically inconclusive findings have drawn larger scholarly interest to the concept of homogeneity, its origin and consequences (Apfelbaum, Phillips, and Richeson 2014). In the scholarly discourse, diversity is most often conceptualized normatively and in relation with tangible employee characteristics such as race,

gender, and age, whereas the intangible dimensions are not a main interest. Studies following this narrower perspective logically equate lower degrees of diversity with lacking representation, hence interpreting workforce homogeneity as a defective state which diversity may cure (Fernandez 2007). Tackling underrepresentation by offering better access and opportunities for members of visible minorities is a key objective of diversity management in the public sector, consequentially linking diversity with ideas of inclusion and equality (Oberfield 2016) and homogeneity with a lack of both.

However, diversity also incorporates *intangible* factors such as beliefs, values, culture, attitudes, and motivations, all of which are crucial for team efficiency, employee wellbeing, and productivity (Kirkman and Shapiro 2001; Santos, Hayward, and Ramos 2012; Veage et al. 2014). Classic Weberian bureaucracies are designed as cloning machines, which are supposed to attract and retain employees that share these same motivations to warrant a smooth execution of formalized bureaucratic rules and procedures (Weber 1922). Latent behavioural dynamics related with homophily, but also explicit policies and routines result in processes of attraction, selection, and attrition leading to a workforce that is highly likely to being homogenous regarding their motivational, psychological, and physical attributes (Jackson, May, and Whitney 1995; Schott and Ritz 2018). Apfelbaum, Phillips, and Richeson (2014) point out that a high degree of employee homogeneity regarding values and motivation such as equity or civil duty is the explicit norm or implicit aspiration in most public organizations, particularly civil services, and links strongly with the prolific discourse on public service motivation (PSM). Accordingly, it is assumed that homogeneity levels regarding intangible dimensions are higher in the public vis-à-vis the private sector. This can be explained with the *attraction-selection-attrition* (ASA) model. The ASA model explains how certain forces within organizations ‘operate to attract, select, and retain an increasingly homogenous group of employees’ (Leisink and Steijn 2008, 120). It describes how individuals are first, *attracted* to organizations that they perceive as similar regarding their own values, motives, and personality traits (e.g. PSM), second, how organizations *select* new members by their congruence to existing skills and abilities within the organization, and third, how members that do not fit to the organization leave over time due to the process of *attrition*. Therefore, the ASA model constitutes a theoretical foundation of workforce composition and homogeneity. PSM is often argued to play an important role in accelerating the processes described in the ASA model through person-organization fit – i.e. the compatibility between employees and the entire organization – particularly regarding the desired value congruence (Sekiguchi 2007; Ritz, Weißmüller, and Meynhardt 2022).

Curiously, the mainstream diversity discourse seems to neglect that value-based (intangible) homogeneity is argued to be normatively desirable (see, e.g. the PSM and public value discourse), exposing a paradoxical hole in the theory on public workforce composition: Can homogeneity be the – often presumed undesired – opposite of diversity if (intangible) homogeneity is argued to be a desirable outcome of public personnel management and recruitment policy? The scholarly discourse already provides several empirical findings that support the conceptualization of homogeneity as more than ‘the lack of diversity’. For instance, Öberg, Oskarsson, and Svensson (2011, 365) show that homogeneity in the form of ‘egalitarian and ethnically homogenous’ workplaces may help build trust levels in groups. Particularly, group coordination and cohesion are affected by homogeneity. For instance, Brewer (1999) finds that most discriminatory behaviours are not motivated by an aversion towards out-groups but by individuals’ wish to maintain and promote positive relations within their in-group.

Similarly, Halevy, Bornstein, and Sagiv (2008) and Apfelbaum, Phillips, and Richeson (2014) illustrate that the motive to cooperate within homogenous in-groups is distinct from and even stronger than conflict behaviours towards out-group members. These findings strongly point towards two distinct psychological phenomena (homogeneity *and* diversity) and not simply two ends of the same continuum (homogeneity *versus* diversity). We argue that these independent effects of workforce homogeneity on individual and group outcomes are largely overlooked in the diversity discourse. Hence, this study explores the concept of homogeneity in the PM literature more thoroughly, taking first steps towards a more nuanced understanding of the nature of workforce homogeneity as a theoretical concept beyond diversity.

Systematic literature review

Following the principles of problematization (Alvesson and Sandberg 2011), we illuminate the conceptual independence of homogeneity and provide an overview of the scientific discourse on potential causes and consequences in the public sector. We opted for a systematic literature review which relies on a rigorous, transparent, and theory-informed search strategy to identify and synthesize the complete body of relevant studies (Moher et al. 2009). This review's strongest contribution lies in the systematic condensation of a previously dispersed and understudied research topic in the PM discourse. By developing theoretical building blocks, we constitute homogeneity as an independent concept and explore its causes and potential consequences. Specifically, this review addresses the following research questions.

- (1) How is the concept of public sector workforce homogeneity conceptualized in the scholarly discourse?
- (2) What are the *causes* of public sector workforce homogeneity?
- (3) What are the *consequences* of public sector workforce homogeneity?

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: the next section describes the empirical strategy, the research procedure, and the coding method. We use Moher et al. (2009) 'Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses' (PRISMA) approach to structure and report our search strategy and subsequent steps of analysis. The systematic search and coding procedure reveal a clearer conceptualization of the concept of homogeneity and clusters of causes and consequences. After presenting a synthesizing summary of the findings, limitations and implications for future research are discussed.

Materials and Methods

We conducted this systematic literature review for four reasons. First, since research on the efficiency of diversity measures frequently lead to ambiguous results, analysing public workforce homogeneity may function as a remedy for an entangled body of empirical evidence and inform public personnel management (Schneider 1987; Apfelbaum, Phillips, and Richeson 2014; Prebble 2016; Schott and Ritz 2018). HR departments need to better understand the relationship between diversity and homogeneity as well as homogeneity's independent causes and consequences to implement diversity policies effectively and to avoid unintended outcomes. Second, a systematic literature review allows for the inductive identification of arguments, concepts, and theory lenses used to capture the phenomenon, hence revealing latent clusters beyond the research mainstream. Third, the topic of workforce homogeneity has created sufficient interest in the field of public personnel management (see, e.g. Schaveling, Blaauw,

and van Montfort 2017; or Richards and Duxbury 2015) and general management research (e.g. Xu, Ling, and Park 2021; Grotto and Andreassi 2020; or Steffens, Terjesen, and Davidsson 2012) to allow for conducting a systematic literature review. However, the current discourse in management studies focuses on workforce homogeneity as a contextual factor (Xu, Ling, and Park 2021) or as an independent or moderating variable calling for more in-depth exploration (Zhang 2019; Li et al. 2018). Fourth, while there are literature reviews on *diversity* in public (Wise and Tschirhart 2000) and general management research (Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider 2011), to the best of our knowledge, there is yet no meta-level study investigating public workforce homogeneity specifically. Systematic literature reviews are meta-studies that follow a rigorous methodological procedure to identify relevant literature comprehensively through an explicit a-priori search and inclusion strategy (Cooper, Hedges, and Valentine 2009). Scientific progress relies on the iterative accumulation of knowledge derived from the empirical evidence of many studies (Glass 1977). To date, only a limited number of systematic reviews relate to workforce homogeneity as an outcome but with purposefully limited scope, e.g. by focusing on the particular role of PSM in employee self-selection into public service (see Perry and Wise 1990; or Schott and Ritz 2018).

Search strategy

The studies included in the review were identified as follows. First, we performed a search on the topic of homogeneity in all leading² PM journals. Second, we conducted a systematic search in the major online database ISI Web of Science Core Collection with open start date but restricted to publications by end of 2020, by searching for keywords in title, abstract, and keywords of scientific peer-reviewed journal articles to maximize the search query output. We generated search terms by combining terms that exclusively refer to this sector – [*‘public sector’* OR *‘public service’* OR *‘public authority’* OR *‘public governance’* OR *‘public administrat*’* OR *‘public organi\$ation’* OR *‘public management’* OR *‘civil servant*’* OR *‘public employee*’* OR *‘civil employee*’*]³ – with the target terms referring to workforce homogeneity and non-diversity used in the scholarly discourse, i.e. [*‘homogen*’* OR *‘cohesive’* OR *‘uniformity’* OR *‘conformity’* OR *‘selection bias’* OR *‘heuristic’* OR *‘team structure’* OR *‘workforce’* OR *‘group mentality’* OR *‘group dynamics’*]. Moreover, we explicitly included the well-established concepts of (*dark sides of*) *public service motivation* (PSM) (Perry and Wise 1990; Schott and Ritz 2018) as well as the *ASA model* (Schneider 1987) in our search strategy by extending the key words by [*‘homophily’* OR *‘groupthink’* OR *‘group-think’* OR *‘self-selection’* OR *‘ASA’* OR *‘attraction-selection-attribution’*] to capture paradigms implicitly linked with workforce homogeneity (Schott and Ritz 2018). We retrieved N = 1,063 studies through this search procedure.

Inclusion criteria and final set selection

Following the PRISMA approach (Moher et al. 2009), we applied six criteria to distil all relevant studies from the initial set of N = 1,063 hits for the systematic review. First, we only included studies focusing on the workforce in the *public sector*. Second, studies needed to contain either *causes* or *consequences* of workforce homogeneity (or both), which implies an explicit or implicit definition of homogeneity as well. Considering that homogeneity is often conceived as a baseline against which effects of workforce diversity are interpreted (Apfelbaum, Phillips, and Richeson 2014), we also included research focusing on *diversity* if these studies presented, for example, unsuccessful diversity management strategies that resulted

in the persistence or increase of homogeneity. Third, regarding the perspective of consequences, any articles that mentioned general impacts related to workforce composition on the organization or its members were included. Studies that did not focus on homogeneity in the *workforce* but concentrated on macro-level effects – e.g. related with organizational power structures or hierarchies – were excluded for lack of precision in topical fit. Fourth, we set no restriction on the publication date of articles to obtain the maximal number of relevant sources in this dispersed research field. Fifth, since the most influential journals targeted at an international scholarly audience publish in English, only these articles were included. Sixth, only published, peer-reviewed work was considered, excluding all grey literature for quality control and rigour (Rothstein and Hopewell 2009).

Applying the aforementioned selection criteria lead to a final sample of $n = 31$ articles from the initial set of $N = 1,093$ articles. Appendix A reports this iterative selection process with a PRISMA flow diagram (Moher et al. 2009) in more detail, and Appendix B summarizes this final set of studies, providing details on author(s), year of publication, country focus, title, journal, methods, and key findings. Subsequently, each study's content was analysed inductively using an iterative recursive qualitative coding procedure to reveal *causes* and *consequences* of workforce homogeneity, paying close attention to the *conceptualization* of homogeneity at the same time. This coding procedure was conducted independently by two researchers to increase reliability (Mayring 2015). The revealed causes were aggregated abductively by inference to the best explanation into three clusters, further subdivided by these clusters' focus on individual microlevel or organizational mesolevel effects. We categorized consequences of workforce homogeneity by their valence (i.e. desired vs. undesired outcomes) as identified by the respective author(s) of the studies from the perspective of PM, resulting in four categories of consequences.

Results

Descriptive results

The articles retrieved for systematic analysis were published between 1990 and 2020. Seven articles date back to the period prior to 2010 and the remaining 24 (77.4%) articles were published after 2012. Two-thirds ($n = 19$; 61.3%) were published recently, within the last five years of the search query, which underlines the nascency of the topic in the PM discourse (see Figure 1). The $n = 31$ studies of the final set were published in 22 different journals pointing towards a rather dispersed discourse. Increasing publication numbers also reflect the growing interest in public workforce composition research following the growing diversification of Western societies and institutions (McGrandle 2017) and a more prominent integration of diversity principles as part of bureaucratic reforms (OECD 2010).

Most studies ($n = 10$; 32.3%) research public workforce homogeneity in the U.S., $n = 9$ (29.0%) research European countries, $n = 7$ (22.6%) Australia, Canada, or New Zealand, one study researches South Korea, one study compares two developing African countries, and one article presented comparative cross-country research. Comparative research into the relationship between workforce homogeneity and specific administrative traditions and country cultures is particularly scarce which is surprising given that institutional and structural differences are sensitive to country-specific and historical developments (Ayaita, Yang, and Güral 2019, 24). Only six studies explicitly mention that country-specific factors may influence

the understanding and normative evaluation of homogeneity. Barfort et al. (2019) and Yeboah-Assiamah et al. (2016) refer to cultural homogeneity as a potential factor influencing unethical behaviour and groupthink. Danzer (2019) and Chandler, Heidrich, and Kasa (2017) conducted research in former Soviet Union-countries and address the role of historic developments in workforce composition due to privatization efforts and cultural characteristics. Scott and Macaulay (2020) point out that New Zealand's goal of creating a unified public service identity may influence the level of homogeneity observed. Yet, country effects do not constitute the general perspectives of homogeneity in the studies.

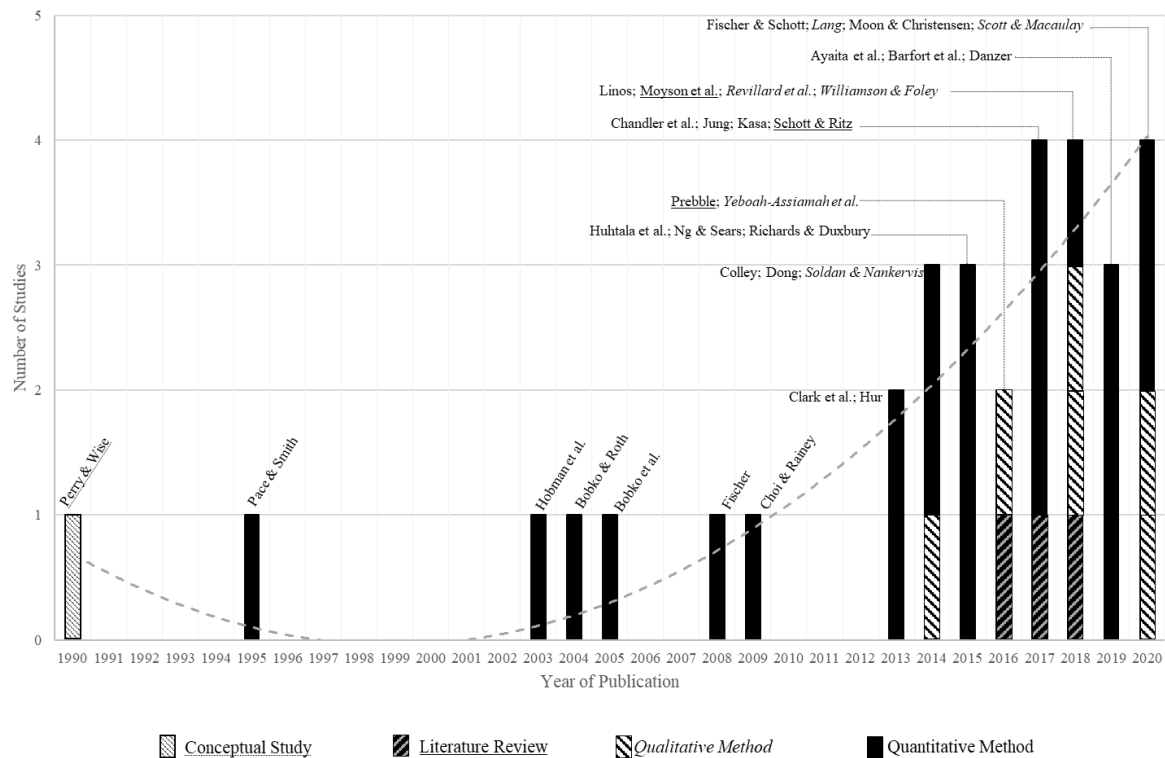


Figure 1. Summary of studies reviewed by method and year of publication.

Regarding research methods, most studies retrieved ($n = 21$, 67.7%) rely on quantitative methods, among which only three studies' empiricism is based on a (quasi-)experimental design; $n = 3$ articles present literature reviews, only one of which is a systematic review. These three literature reviews focus on PSM (Prebble 2016; Schott and Ritz 2018) and socialization (Moyson et al. 2018), and while they do reveal specific causes and/or consequences of workforce homogeneity, they do not focus on the concept of workforce homogeneity itself. Furthermore, $n = 6$ articles use qualitative methods and one article – Perry and Wise (1990) – is purely conceptual (see Figure 1 and Appendix B).

Main analysis

Concepts and definitions

Addressing this study's first research question regarding the conceptualization of homogeneity, we find that most studies ($n = 23$) do not provide any explicit definition or conceptual specification of the terms 'homogeneity', 'heterogeneity', or 'diversity'; several authors even

explicate the lack of conceptual clarity. For instance, Schott and Ritz (2018, 40) recommend more accurate ‘reflecting on the composition of the work teams and organizations’, Choi and Rainey (2010, 116) stress the ‘need for a more nuanced interpretation of diversity’. The studies that do discuss and define (any of) these concepts, do so rather imprecisely. Four articles use the terms ‘heterogeneity’ and ‘diversity’ synonymously, positioning homogeneity as their counter concept and often in a normatively negative way. For instance, Hobman, Bordia, and Gallois (2003, 302) explain that the term ‘group diversity is used to refer to the amount of heterogeneity within a group or unit on certain characteristics’ while Moon and Christensen (2020, 158) state that ‘practices [. . .] and leadership committed to workforce heterogeneity create a positive work atmosphere for diversity’. Other studies use ambiguous or implicit definitions derived from their own research questions. One example is Clark, Ochs, and Frazier (2013, 86) who research representative bureaucracy and describe a lack of diversity as ‘patterned disparities in the representation’. Linos (2018, 68) explains the increasing diversity in police departments as the result of attracting ‘new and different candidates’ but remaining imprecise in whether this relates to tangible or intangible characteristics.

Considering the related scholarly debates on inclusion, equality, and discrimination draws an even more heterogeneous picture. Almost one-third of the articles reviewed ($n = 10$) refers to the topics of equality, inclusion, and representation, but the conceptual links with diversity or homogeneity are loose and often multidirectional. For instance, Clark, Ochs, and Frazier (2013, 76) state that diversity ‘is salient because it connotes democracy, citizenship, inclusion, parity, and equal opportunity’, while Bobko and Roth (2004) argue that installing the objective of workforce diversity represents a value-based decision or may be driven by legal considerations not necessarily resembling fairness. The entanglement of these dissimilar conceptualizations and perspectives as well as the lacking degree of problematization and reflection regarding the use of these terms calls for a (re)conceptualization of diversity and homogeneity.

Furthermore, the partial absence and vagueness of definitions as well as the high variety of interpretations used is an important initial finding. It explains why the discourse on workforce homogeneity is dispersed since a lack of a common core conceptual foundation decreases the comparability of empirical results and hinders the detection of research gaps. As an interim answer to our first research question, we find that homogeneity is defined vaguely in most of the scholarship, predominantly as the opposite of heterogeneity which is equated with diversity. Since diversity is used normatively – i.e. as a desired outcome of public personnel policy – workforce homogeneity is mostly conceptualized as a negative outcome of HR practices which may relate both to tangible and intangible workforce characteristics.

Causes of workforce homogeneity in the public sector

Our second research question asked what empirical evidence exists regarding the causes of public workforce homogeneity to explore the emergence of this phenomenon. The coding procedure disclosed three clusters of causes, which lead to, or foster, homogenous workforce in the public sector: *self-selection*, *personnel policies*, and *socialization and cultural persistence*. The following section summarizes the three clusters with direct references to the studies reviewed, linking these causes with the respective process stages of the ASA model (Schneider 1987).

Self-selection (attraction)

The first argumentative cluster used to explain workforce homogeneity in the public sector is self-selection. This micro-level perspective describes the measurable outcome of an individual's implicit or explicit preference to associate themselves with a group or sector based on tangible as well as non-tangible characteristics such as affect, perceived similarity (Ng and Sears 2015; Danzer 2019), ethical preferences (Ayaita, Yang, and Güral 2019; Barfort et al. 2019) but also parental socialization that prime homophily in job choice (Fischer and Schott 2020). As a result, individuals make employment choices that will eventually lead to their professional association with a public organization – as opposed to a private sector firm. As one of the key propositions for the relevance of PSM, Perry and Wise (1990) argue that individuals with high PSM levels are especially likely to self-select into public sector employment because pursuing a career in a public agency, whose goals are directed towards fostering public welfare, entails the opportunity to help others and society, which is assumed to be a central motive for high-PSM individuals. This process of PSM-based self-selection presents a reason for homogeneity in the public sector, especially regarding intangible dimensions (Jackson, May, and Whitney 1995). Quantitative research by Ayaita, Yang, and Güral (2019), using a large sample of German individuals, affirms Perry and Wise (1990) conceptual study by revealing that individuals with strong convictions regarding civic virtue are particularly likely to actively self-select into public sector employment.

Linós (2018) extends this perspective by incorporating the concepts of 'stereotype threat' and 'belonging uncertainty' into the homogeneity discourse. The author points out that especially visible minorities and groups – such as women and people of colour – hesitate to apply for positions in public sector employment because these groups often fear being subjugated to negative stereotypical behaviour. Ng and Sears (2015) present further empirical evidence from Canada showing that visible minorities often prefer private sector employment, implicitly assuming that the private workforce is less homogenous so they would be less likely to stand out. The authors argue that especially immigrants of visible ethnicity seek for the opportunity of rapid socioeconomic mobility, which they tend to associate with the private rather than the public sector. Ng and Sears (2015) further explain that visible minorities' preference for the private sector is compounded by the fact that especially recent immigrants may have a negative image of governments since they may have suffered from political prosecution. Nonetheless, these observations and explanations for self-selection into the private sector are context-specific and may be generalized across national contexts only to a limited extent.

Other authors relate the phenomenon of sectoral self-selection to latent character traits such as risk-aversion. Dong (2017) and Jung (2017) find that risk-averse individuals are more likely to self-select into the public sector because in many countries public sector employment offers comparatively higher job-security and wage stability. Jung (2017) also shows that women tend to be more risk-averse compared to men and, hence, are supposedly more likely to self-select into the public sector. In sum, studies on self-selection as a main cause of public sector workforce homogeneity often heavily rely on the idea that individual preferences and not necessarily sectoral differences in personnel sourcing and retention drive professional sector choice, stressing that individual micro-level characteristics reinforce self-selection and, hence, perpetuate workforce homogeneity.

Personnel policies (selection)

Workforce homogeneity is not only a result of individuals' sector choice but also of the organization's personnel policies, including strategies of recruitment, procedures for promotion and dismissal, as well as possibilities of personnel development (Lang 2020). The reviewed literature differentiates between two perspectives on the effects of personnel policies: policies that directly foster homogeneity and policies that target towards increasing diversity but fail their purpose or entail counter-productive side effects (Moon and Christensen 2020). Research on personnel policies fostering homogeneity focuses mainly on organizational recruitment and promotion strategies. Since the inception of this concept, the scientific discourse on PSM has stressed that PSM can be a powerful tool for attracting employees by strategically promoting public agencies' explicit connection to PSM's underlying dimensions (Perry and Wise 1990). Linos (2018) shows that PSM-related signalling in job advertising is still a common strategy in civil services, attracting applicants that fit this pattern of motives and motivations. Intangible, motivational homogeneity regarding political partisanship and administrative ideology also highly influences the promotion and appointments for civil servants. Clark, Ochs, and Frazier (2013) use the appointment history of the Federal Executive Service in the U.S. to illustrate that shared ideological views determine personnel decisions, creating a 'glass ceiling' for political minorities and non-mainstream ideas.

Another focus lies on the effects of promotion procedures specific to the public sector. Focusing on the tangible diversity dimension of age, Colley's (2014) study presents an explanation for the continuing trend of ageing in Australia's civil service. She describes how changing the civil service recruitment strategy from a career-based to a position-based system dramatically increased the age profile of their public sector workforce. While this reform had the desired outcome of reducing employee turnover, it increased homogeneity regarding age groups – especially in later cohorts – over time. Colley (2014) illustrates how recruitment processes function as gatekeepers, dramatically affecting the later stages of employees' career paths. Fischer (2008) further shows that promotion based on seniority is a more widespread practice in the public sector compared with the private sector, particularly in HR-decisions on reward allocation, promotions, salary raises, and layoffs. These findings are supported by recent research investigating political careers and nominations in the public sector (Cirone, Cox, and Fiva 2021). Rewarding seniority fosters homogeneity through stabilizing tacit structures and impedes the chances of entry and development for new members of the organization.

Whereas these personnel policies reinforce homogenous workforce composition in civil services, other policies intended to diversify teams fail or even result in unintended side effects. A popular strategy aimed at increasing workforce diversity relies on increasing transparency and recruitment tool accessibility for underrepresented groups. For instance, Bobko, Roth, and Buster (2005) examine the effect of 'work sample tests' in public sector recruitment. Work sample tests are assessment measures that confront applicants with relevant tasks or problems that are representative of the position they applied for. For years, these tests have enjoyed great popularity with HR departments because they are assumed to be objectively fair and minority friendly, avoiding the biases inherent in e.g. cognitive ability tests (Bobko, Roth, and Buster 2005). However, Bobko, Roth, and Buster (2005) show that work sample tests contain the same potential of discriminatory bias against visible minorities and do in fact not level the playing field. Bardach, Rushby, and Klassen (2021) report comparable results in situational judgement tests (SJTs). Furthermore, a study by Bobko and Roth (2004) illustrates the common deficits of diversity-related recruitment strategies in practice when relying on top score-referenced

banding. Bobko and Roth (2004) show that due to algorithmic fallacies these bandwidths are often incorrect and label too many applicants falsely as ‘equal’, which interferes with the strategy’s original goal. The authors hence stress the danger of overestimating the relevance of algorithm-based selection tools when implementing affirmative action. Studies by Pace and Smith (1995) and Soldan and Nankervis (2014) show that diversity-related concepts, such as affirmative action, can be easily misunderstood by practitioners, resulting in confusion and ambiguity instead of encouraging diversity-conscious hiring practices. Soldan and Nankervis (2014) detect a ‘commitment-implementation gap’ in Australia’s public sector regarding the difference between the formulation of diversity management goals and their actual implementation. The authors show that targeted recruitment, employee development, and employee retention rhetoric and practice often greatly diverge, which results in distrust between employees and their organizations, consequently rendering diversity-directed personnel policies inefficient.

Besides recruitment policies, trainings for personnel managers aiming at creating awareness of unconscious biases in recruitment have become an increasingly popular practice. Yet, Williamson and Foley (2018) question the effectiveness of such trainings, because they aim towards changing individuals’ behaviour but often neglect structural causes. Moreover, trainings focusing on the involuntary nature of biases tend to normalize and trivialize them. In extreme cases, the attempt to convince people to reflect and overcome their biases can paradoxically reinforce stereotyping (Williamson and Foley 2018), which calls for profound evaluations of trainings to avoid unintended effects.

Socialization and cultural persistence (attrition)

The third cluster of causes is *socialization* and the *cultural persistence* of practices and behaviours that reinforce homogeneity on the organizational (macro) level. Several studies focus on those processes in public organizations that function latently and result in workforce homogenization over time by creating a new shared social identity (Scott and Macaulay 2020). In their systematic literature review, Moyson et al. (2018) synthesize diverse streams of research on socialization processes in public personnel management research. Although the authors stress that implicit processes of socialization are less powerful in reinforcing homogeneity compared with explicit processes of personnel selection, organizational socialization is essential in determining person-organization fit and moderates the transformation of new employees to full organizational members. Schott and Ritz (2018) use Schneider, Goldstein, and Smith (1995) ASA model to explain how PSM relates to socialization and homogenization in the public sector workforce. Organizations that are explicitly pledged to PSM will attract individuals that hold similarly high levels of PSM, and these individuals will – due to their high person-organization fit – be more likely to be successful in the recruitment process. Reversely, people with low levels of PSM – and, consequently, low person-organization fit – will either be less likely to be hired or will eventually leave the organization. Socialization processes are strongly linked with organizational culture. In a replicated cross-sectoral study, Chandler, Heidrich, and Kasa (2017) show that particularly dominant types of organizational culture can be extremely persistent in a public sector context and are often hardly affected by external or internal incentives to change. These findings resonate with Revillard et al. (2018) study using bibliographic interviews to demonstrate persistent inequality in the French public sector regarding both gender and minorities based on a ‘glass-ceiling’ effect related to organizational culture.

Consequences of workforce homogeneity in the public sector

Our third research question asked for the consequences – i.e. the effects and outcomes – of tangible as well as intangible homogeneity in the public sector workforce. The reviewed articles contain four clusters of consequences of homogeneity: *employee wellbeing and performance*, *rigidity*, *groupthink*, and *lack of neutrality*. The valence of effects (intended or unintended) differs, and several articles imply both desired and undesired effects. Furthermore, consequences' level (individual, organization, or macrosocial) of effects is often neither explicitly defined nor discussed. However, identifying these consequences produces conceptual clarity and elevates homogeneity from a too simplistic notion as a mere 'lack of diversity' to a phenomenon that actually leads to independent outcomes.

Employee wellbeing and performance

The first category of consequences of a homogenous workforce highlights the positive effects on employees' wellbeing and organizational performance. However, the relation of these effects (cause and effect) is partially disputed. *Employee wellbeing* is related to several concepts, such as motivation, satisfaction, or team harmony, and often linked with *performance* at the organizational level (Choi and Rainey 2010; Hur 2013). One perspective focuses on the link between occurring conflicts and the tangible dimension of ethnical diversity. Hur (2013) examines this relationship using the case of U.S. police departments and shows that increasing ethnical diversity leads to more conflicts, which decreases performance. Choi and Rainey (2010) present related results, stating that racial diversity in U.S. federal agencies decreases organizational performance concluding that a more homogenous workforce might experience less internal conflict and, hence, perform better. Huhtala et al. (2015) show that homogenous work units sharing similar experiences create a stronger and more cohesive ethical culture, which, in turn, increases employee engagement, lowers individuals' likelihood to suffer from burnout, and increases job satisfaction (Danzer 2019). Hobman, Bordia, and Gallois (2003) support this relation by explaining how the intangible dimension of value congruence in teams of civil servants reduces task and relationship conflicts and increases team motivation and involvement. This performance link is supported by Richards and Duxbury (2015), who show that workforce homogeneity correlates with more effective knowledge sharing, group-based learning, and a higher degree of knowledge dissemination, because acquiring and sharing knowledge is easier in homogenous groups.

Rigidity

The second category of consequences of workforce homogeneity is procedural and organizational *rigidity* often related to conservatism in decision-making processes. 'Conservatism' in this sense does not refer to any political orientation and is not used normatively but characterizes individuals as conservative if they feel highly committed to rather traditional value paradigms, which might manifest in a certain reluctance to innovation and change. As causes of a homogenous workforce, self-selection, recruitment practices, and socialization processes are strongly related to uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede 2003), consequently reinforcing the status-quo in both organizational procedures and best practices in strategic and operative decision-making (Clark, Ochs, and Frazier 2013; Dong 2017; Moyson et al. 2018; Linos 2018). Fischer (2008) discusses the dual effect of rigidity. On the one hand, procedural rigidity creates trust and reduces turn-over intentions because it signals long-term

stability and, hence, reduces recruitment costs. Stability guarantees performance predictability and may be particularly crucial in the public sector, in which the careful balancing of public interest and public resources is expected (Dong 2017). On the other hand, Fischer (2008) stresses the negative consequence of rigidity in an organizational context. While fast-changing, dynamic environments demand flexibility and adapting to the new status-quo, public sector organizations that rely on a particularly homogenous workforce may eventually be unable to cope with these dynamics. A similar argument focuses on innovation capacities. Through the proxy of risk-aversion, rigidity is linked with lacking innovativeness and entrepreneurship (Dong 2017).

Groupthink

A mainly unintended consequence of workforce homogeneity, especially regarding intangible dimensions, is *groupthink*. Groupthink describes the phenomenon that homogenous groups with strong ties tend to seek congruence to a degree that it results in misjudgement and even objectively bad decision making (Janis 1972). Schott and Ritz (2018) interpret the concept within the frame of the ‘dark side’ of PSM, as workforce homogeneity related with individuals’ core values and motives creates highly cohesive groups that are more prone to misjudgement due to peer pressure. Furthermore, the authors derive inflexibility and non-responsiveness of workforce engaged in groupthink since homogenous groups are less able to successfully adapt in dynamic organizational environments.

Yeboah-Assiamah et al. (2016) present similar findings when examining unethical behaviour in public sector organizations in Ghana and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The authors use the ASA model and social-cognitive-theory to explain how leading executives affect and prime their subordinates’ behaviour by creating benchmarks and (a)moral groupthink, which eventually creates a norm of organizational behaviour and decision-making. Whereas these effects of workforce homogeneity stress the threat of unintended consequences on the organizational level, Schott and Ritz (2018) also raise awareness that a homogenous high-PSM workforce may cause undesirable micro-level behaviours, such as blind rule-following and unethical behaviour since homogeneity and person-environment fit reduces individuals’ incentive to question the status quo of conduct.

Lack of neutrality

In addition to groupthink, a *lack of neutrality* presents another unintended consequence of workforce homogeneity. Prebble (2016) stresses that the concept of PSM relates to prosocial motives, such as ‘the plight of the underprivileged’ or a ‘better life for the poor’ (Kim et al. 2013, 92). While these prosocial motives are laudable causes, they cannot claim universal legitimacy in the context of Weberian administrative traditions, in which bureaucracy is installed to explicitly guarantee neutrality and equality for all clients – irrespective of their sociodemographic characteristics (Weber 1922). By actively pursuing recruitment strategies that create and reinforce a strong orientation towards PSM within the workforce, public agencies risk lacking neutrality, which eventually results in unintended politicization of bureaucratic processes and discrimination of certain types of clients that are perceived as relatively more – or less – deserving than others (Jilke and Tummers 2018; Weißmüller, De Waele, and van Witteloostuijn 2022). Clark, Ochs, and Frazier (2013) show that these biases are especially related to promotion and personnel reward strategies that are particularly informed by ideological partisanship. Moreover, research provides evidence that misapplication

and lacking understanding of certain diversity measures may result in the explicit support of specific minorities while neglecting others. For instance, several authors raise concerns about interpreting diversity management solely as promoting white women at the expense of reinforcing the discrimination of women of colour (Clark, Ochs, and Frazier 2013). These biases manifest in an unbalanced representation of the general public among the workforce of public agencies resulting in institutional delegitimization and losses in workforce performance (Wise and Tschirhart 2000).

Discussion

The purpose of this systematic literature review was to explore homogeneity as a theoretical concept beyond ‘non-diversity’ by synthesizing how homogeneity is conceptualized in the literature and to synthesize the current discourse on causes and consequences of workforce homogeneity in the public sector. As illustrated in Figure 2, our first contribution is to reveal that, so far, the scientific discourse revolves around three clusters of causes that explain the emergence and stickiness of workforce homogeneity: self-selection, personnel policies, and socialization processes. Whereas the concepts of self-selection and socialization are widely accepted and explored, the implications of personnel policies, such as recruitment and diversity strategies, constitute a relatively new research area and offer many opportunities for future research. The fact that strategies and measures explicitly targeted at increasing workforce diversity often fail to meet their goal and sometimes even result in counter effects is an especially interesting finding because it indicates that diversity strategies can paradoxically foster homogenization (Bobko and Roth 2004; Soldan and Nankervis 2014; Williamson and Foley 2018).

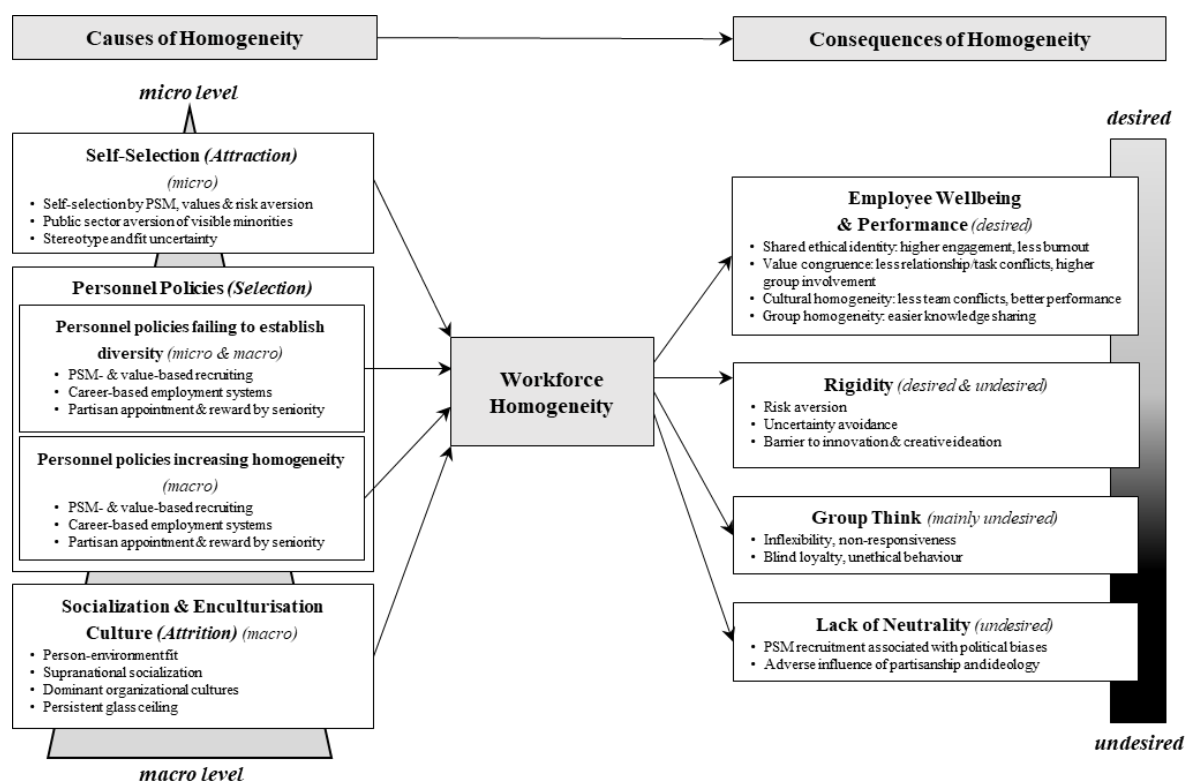


Figure 2. Synthesis of causes & consequences of workforce homogeneity in the discourse.

Another interesting finding is that the review only revealed three major causes of homogeneity, which presents a limited range of factors and calls for future exploration. For instance, the analyzed literature does not consider systemic factors linked with the specific nature of professions more often nested within the public sector that tend to attract women more strongly than men, such as occupations in the fields of care work and health provision (OECD 2019). However, this finding might result from our search strategy, which did not specifically target the care or educational sector. Future studies can build on our findings and examine specialist disciplines more closely.

Moreover, the current review stresses the significance of the interplay between the level of the individual and the organization when examining causes of workforce homogeneity in the public sector. The effects of self-selection and recruitment processes are intricately connected and may lead to micro-level biases in personnel choices irrespective of organizational goals and policies. Socialization processes, however, occur beyond the micro-level and understanding them in more depth may help explain, e.g. how organizational culture persistently influences value conformity over years (Chandler, Heidrich, and Kasa 2017). Bearing in mind the duality of structure and agency (Giddens 1984), the three categories of causes emphasize the interconnectedness of the factors that influence homogeneity, ranging from individual attitudes, the design of recruitment processes, trainings, and colleague interactions to complex long-term socialization mechanisms. Considering that individual- and organization-level effects may even work in opposing directions, these findings strongly suggest embracing an integrative perspective to fully understand these relationships. We, therefore, encourage future research to overcome the limitations from focusing on isolated levels by, for instance, conducting cross-hierarchical research to trace how policies transform and cascade into processes and agency over time.

The second key contribution of this study relates to the *consequences* of a homogenous workforce in the public sector. Although the discourse treats them as outliers or quasi-irrelevant side effects, we distilled four clusters of consequences encompassing both desired and undesired effects: *groupthink*, *lack of neutrality and representation*, *employee wellbeing and performance*, and *rigidity*. We show that personnel policies, such as PSM-informed targeted recruiting or seniority reward schemes, may direct workforce composition towards homogeneity of tangible and non-tangible dimensions in several ways and to both desired and undesired outcomes. Currently, the concept of groupthink is used to explain mainly negative effects of a homogenous workforce, linking them with unethical behaviour, un-responsiveness, and blind loyalty (Schott and Ritz 2018). Lacking neutrality and representation describe an effect of political biases, arising from selection, attraction, and rewarding processes, which, in turn, lead to decreasing institutional legitimacy and organizational performance (Wise and Tschirhart 2000). Investigating the performance effect of a homogenous workforce in the public sector offers plenty of opportunity for future research, whereas moderating variables such as conflict, knowledge acquisition, or employee satisfaction need theoretical linkage with workforce composition. Besides, this connection needs more critical examination because the causality and the direction of this effect are still unclear (Ely 2004). The fourth category, rigidity, describes the balancing act between lower flexibility, deficits in innovation, and performance predictability as well as organizational stability and trustful long-term relationships between employees and their employers (Fischer 2008; Dong 2017). In summary, these numerous examples of consequences of homogeneity raise reasonable doubts about the one-sided portrayal of diversity as a monolithic theoretical concept (Kochan et al. 2003).

Building on these findings, this study starts a discourse on the reconceptualization of the entangled concepts of homogeneity, heterogeneity, and diversity. We suggest that research into the effects of workforce composition will benefit from integrating the perspective of homogeneity not merely as the flipside of diversity but as an interlinked yet non-congruent concept. An organization's workforce can be described as more or less homogenous on a wide spectrum between the two abstract poles of high to low homogeneity. However, the degree to which we assign the relative label of high vis-à-vis low homogeneity to one workforce compared to another is contingent upon the normative criteria we use for comparison. There are many tangible as well as intangible criteria commonly used to characterize workforces (e.g. age, gender, value orientation, political opinion, cultures, and many more), each of which may serve as a different *dimension of diversity* – e.g. diversity regarding age, gender, or values – each of which set a different marker onto the high vis-à-vis low homogeneity spectrum, allowing to characterize a workforce as homogenous or heterogeneous regarding specific diversity dimensions. This perspective may help explain why increasing workforce diversity does not always result in higher productivity (Selden and Selden 2001; Pitts 2005), a puzzle that problematizes diversity as a panacea (Fernandez 2007). The essential debate about inclusion, equality, and representation touches upon societal, political, and legal arguments, which relate in many ways to the diversity discourse. Each of the potential dimensions of diversity will be informed by cultural and institutional norms and individually or shared societal values. These norms and values shape the degree to which high or low homogeneity regarding a specific diversity dimension will be considered as desirable suggesting that diversity dimensions present inherently normative concepts. However, to examine causes, consequences, moderators, and directions of effects, we need ways to separate these concepts analytically. This is where homogeneity as a descriptive spectrum in contrast to – normative – dimensions of diversity may suit. Reconceptualizing homogeneity and repositioning diversity does not aim at undermining the significance of the diversity discourse but sheds light on unanswered questions and contradictions that need to be addressed conceptually and empirically. Since more and more public sector organizations worldwide promote diversity and inclusion policies (OECD 2021), it is essential to critically reflect on the mere positive interpretation of this diversity agenda to prevent inefficiency or unintended effects.

Limitations and future research

Problematizing and challenging the understanding of homogeneity as a mere mirror concept of diversity, this systematic literature review advances our understanding of the causes and consequences of workforce homogeneity by revealing that workforce homogeneity is more than a defective state or a baseline for comparison. Yet, we recognize that this review is subject to several limitations. We found that the current discourse on homogeneity is a dispersed research field often lacking precise definitions. This constitutes an obstacle for conducting a systematic literature review because it lacks a 'natural' starting point. We tried to mitigate this challenge by using a range of key words to capture both tangible and intangible forms of homogeneity. These key words were further informed by the ongoing theoretical debate on the link between workforce composition, PSM, which is grounded theoretically in the ASA model. Particularly, this study is the first step in addressing the paradoxical findings in the diversity discourse by highlighting and challenging an often taken-for-granted entanglement of theoretical concepts and terminology. Consequently, we encourage future research on workforce composition to considering explicitly and precisely the (implicit) normativity inherent in the concept of diversity and further unravel the relationship between (dimensions of) homogeneity and

diversity agendas and policies in the public sector workforce. Furthermore, the contradictions and blind spots regarding the consequences of workforce composition call for more empirical and conceptual research on the outcome level, for instance, by focusing on the relationship between homogeneity, team performance, and motivation. Moreover, it is important to note that our study relies on qualitative coding and, effectively, meta-level research on evidence that largely follows a quantitative research epistemology. Many of the quantitative studies reviewed derive correlation-based results and are unable to clearly identify causal mechanisms. Consequently, the causes and consequences of homogeneity on both the individual and the team/organization level are not necessarily distinctive but may interact in the course of time. Reliable empirical evidence is lacking on how individual choices and preferences preserve workforce homogeneity, for instance, through *unconscious* biases in (self-)selection and the perception of person-organization and person-team fit. Future quantitative and comparative research across various administrative traditions may help reveal both the latent micro-behavioural and implicit organizational logics associated with the causes and consequences of workforce homogeneity in the public sector.

Notes

1. By public sector, we refer to the broad sectoral domain occupied by governmental and federal institutions, public institutional systems, and public enterprises (Fletcher et al. 2020).
2. This initial search was conducted in the 20 most prestigious journals ranked by *h5-index* in the field of Public Policy and Administration.
3. We use the broader definition of the ‘public sector’ rather than the narrower ‘administrative core’ to maximize review coverage. Yet, we purposefully exclude the education and healthcare sector in the current study since in many countries, educational and medical services are not exclusively delivered by public institutions but often co-created in a mixed-sector or hybrid environment.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on Contributors

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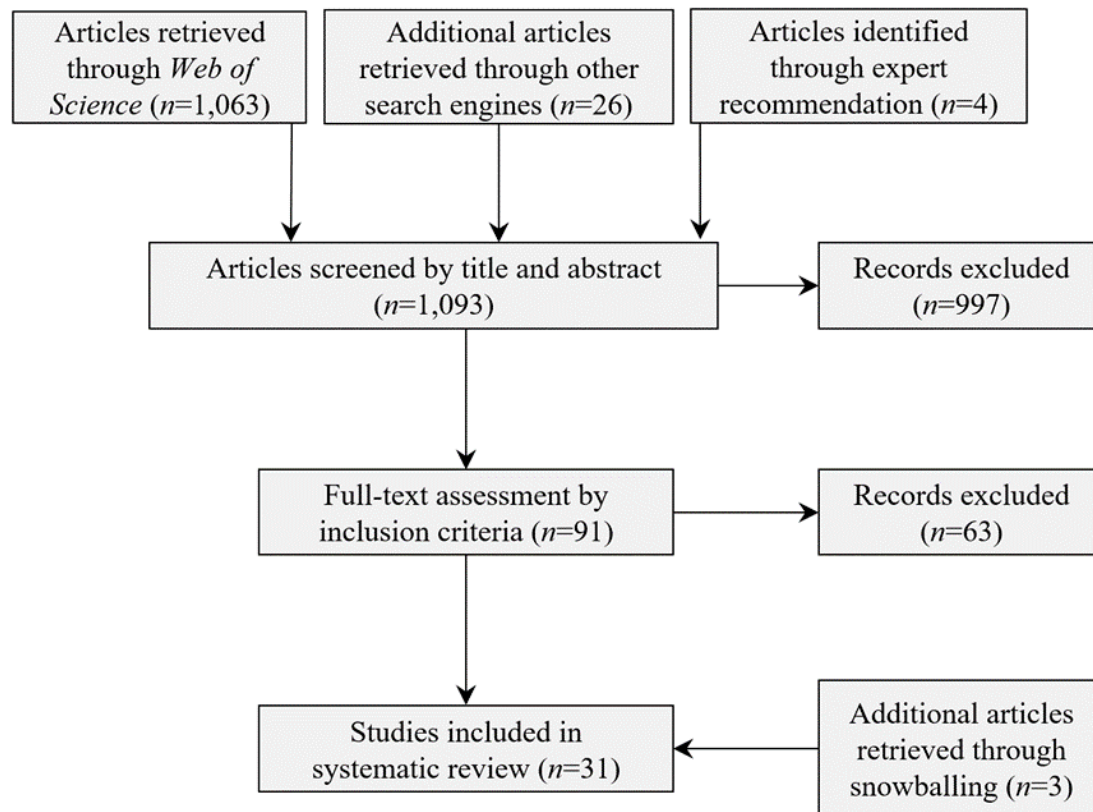
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APPENDIX TO ARTICLE I

Supplementary Online Material

Appendix A – PRISMA Flow Diagram of Review Process



Appendix B – Summary of Studies Reviewed

Author(s)	Year	Journal	Title	Country	Method	Findings	Focus
Ayaita, Yang, and Güla	2019	German Economic Review	Where does the good shepherd go? Civic virtue and sorting into public sector employment	Germany	Quantitative	Individuals motivated by civic virtue are more likely to self-select into public sector employment.	Causes
Barfort et al.	2019	American Economic Journal – Economic Policy	Sustaining honesty in public service: the role of selection	Denmark	Quantitative (experiment)	Honest individuals are more likely to self-select into public service.	Causes
Bobko and Roth	2004	International Journal of Selection and Assessment	Personnel selection with top-score-referenced banding: on the inappropriateness of current procedures	U.S.	Quantitative	Top-Score-Referenced Banding does not increase ethnic diversity.	Causes
Bobko, Roth, and Buster	2005	International Journal of Selection and Assessment	Work sample selection tests and expected reduction in adverse impact: a cautionary note	U.S.	Quantitative	Use of Work Sample Selection Tests does not increase ethnic diversity.	Causes
Chandler, Heidrich, and Kasa	2017	Evidence-based HRM: A Global Forum for Empirical Scholarship	Everything changes? A repeated cross-sectional study of organizational culture in the public sector.	Hungary	Quantitative	Organizational culture persists irrespective of internal or external change.	Causes
Choi and Rainey	2010	Public Administration Review	Managing diversity in U.S. federal agencies: effects of diversity and diversity management on employee perceptions of organizational performance	U.S.	Quantitative	Racial diversity decreases organizational performance.	Consequences
Clark, Ochs, and Frazier	2013	Public Personnel Management	Representative bureaucracy: the politics of access to policy-making positions in the federal executive service	U.S.	Quantitative	Partisanship influences sourcing of federal senior executives.	Causes
Colley	2014	Public Management Review	Understanding aging public sector workforces: demographic challenge or a consequence of public employment policy design?	Australia	Quantitative	Public employment policies reinforce phenomenon of aging workforce.	Causes
Danzer	2019	Labour Economics	Job satisfaction and self-selection into the public or private sector: Evidence from a natural experiment	Ukraine	Quantitative (quasi-experiment)	Different personality types self-select into the public sector; cross-sectoral satisfaction gap	Causes and Consequences
Dong	2017	Administration and Society	Individual risk preference and sector choice: are risk-averse individuals more likely to choose careers in the public sector?	U.S.	Quantitative	Persistent self-selection effects in public sector are based on risk-aversion.	Causes and Consequences
Fischer	2008	The Journal of Social Psychology	Rewarding seniority: exploring cultural and organizational predictors of seniority allocations	Germany, NL, UK, U.S.	Quantitative	Seniority-based reward functions in public sector employment systems result in conservatism and rigidity.	Causes and Consequences

Appendix B – Summary of Studies Reviewed (cont.)

Author(s)	Year	Journal	Title	Country	Method	Findings	Focus
Fischer and Schott	2020	International Review of Administrative Sciences	Why people enter and stay in public service careers: the role of parental socialization and an interest in politics	Switzerland	Quantitative	Parental socialization serves as a stronger predictor of public sector choice than interest in politics.	Causes
Hobman, Bordia, and Gallois	2003	Journal of Business and Psychology	Consequences of feeling dissimilar from others in a work team	Australia	Quantitative	Value dissimilarity increases conflict, decreases involvement.	Consequences
Huhtala et al.	2015	Journal of Business and Psychology	The associations between ethical organizational culture, burnout, and engagement: a multilevel study	Belgium, Luxembourg, NL	Quantitative	Homogeneity in teams fosters ethical organizational cultures, leading to increased engagement and reduced burnout.	Consequences
Hur	2013	International Review of Administrative Sciences	Racial diversity, is it a blessing to an organization? Examining its organizational consequences in municipal police departments	U.S.	Quantitative	Racial diversity increases conflicts and lowers performance.	Consequences
Jung	2017	International Journal of Manpower	The gender wage gap and sample selection via risk attitudes	South Korea	Quantitative	Risk-averse candidates self-select into public sector employment.	Causes
Lang	2020	Ethic and Racial Studies	Workforce diversity policies in practice: drivers and barriers in local administration	Germany	Qualitative	The implementation of diversity policies is contingent on organizational structures.	Causes
Linos	2018	Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory	More than public service: a field experiment on job advertisements and diversity in the police	U.S.	Quantitative (experiment)	PSM-related advertisement is less efficient than diversity-related job advertisement.	Causes
Moon and Christensen	2020	Public Personnel Management	Realizing the performance benefits of workforce diversity in the us federal government: the moderating role of diversity climate	U.S.	Quantitative	Racial and tenure diversity is positively related with organizational performance.	Consequences
Moyson et al.	2018	American Review of Public Administration	Organizational socialization in public administration research: a systematic review and directions for future research	-	Literature Review (systematic)	Five research streams on socialization effects in public sector.	Causes
Ng and Sears	2015	Review of Public Personnel Administration	Toward representative bureaucracy: predicting public service attraction among underrepresented groups in Canada	Canada	Quantitative	Visible minorities are less likely to being attracted to and self-select into the public sector.	Causes
Pace and Smith	1995	Public Personnel Management	Understanding affirmative action – from the practitioners' perspective	U.S.	Quantitative	Affirmative action is often misconceived in practice.	Causes
Perry and Wise	1990	Public Administration Review	The motivational basis of public service	U.S.	Conceptual	PSM influences sector choice.	Causes
Prebble	2016	American Review of Public Administration	Has the study of public service motivation addressed the issues that motivated the study?	-	Literature Review	PSM-based recruitment may lead to lack of neutrality.	Causes and Consequences

Appendix B – Summary of Studies Reviewed (cont.)

Author(s)	Year	Journal	Title	Country	Method	Findings	Focus
Revillard et al.	2018	Revista Internacional de Organizaciones	Gender, class, and bureaucratic power. the production of inequalities in the French civil service	France	Qualitative	Persistent existence of a glass ceiling in French public sector.	Causes
Richards and Duxbury	2015	Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory	Work-group knowledge acquisition in knowledge intensive public-sector organizations: an exploratory study	Canada	Quantitative	Knowledge acquisition is easier in homogenous groups.	Consequences
Schott and Ritz	2018	Perspectives on Public Management and Governance	The dark sides of public service motivation: a multi-level theoretical framework	-	Literature Review	PSM-based recruitment results in groupthink.	Consequences
Scott and Macaulay	2020	Public Money & Management	Making sense of New Zealand's 'spirit of service': social identity and the civil service	New Zealand	Qualitative	Social identity based on civil service values unify workforce and attract a specific type of ethically motivated individuals.	Causes and Consequences
Soldan and Nankervis	2014	Public Personnel Management	Employee perceptions of the effectiveness of diversity management in the Australian public service: rhetoric and reality	Australia	Qualitative	Gap between intentions and implementation of diversity management practices.	Causes
Williamson and Foley	2018	Australian Journal of Public Administration	Unconscious bias training: the silver bullet for gender equity?	Australia	Qualitative	Unconscious bias trainings can have unintended side effects; training effectivity is generally limited in the public sector.	Causes
Yeboah-Assiamah et al.	2016	Journal of Public Affairs	Public sector leadership-subordinate ethical diffusion conundrum: perspectives from developing African countries	Ghana, D. R. Congo	Qualitative	ASA model leads to groupthink regarding ethical issues.	Consequences

**Article II: A Journey to the Upside Down: Challenging the
Paradox Debate in Organization Studies through
Problematization**

Iris Seidemann

*Under Review with Organization Theory
(1st Round of Revise and Resubmit)*

ABSTRACT

Striving for theoretical development, this paper applies the method of problematization to challenge the central assumptions underlying the current paradox debate in the field of organization studies. In particular, the paper critically reassesses the understanding of the ontological nature of paradox, the role of actors in paradox management as well as the often-claimed superiority of ‘both/and’ approaches. Questioning taken-for-granted beliefs and narratives within paradox theory points towards novel research questions but also reveals important boundary conditions and potential risks that emerge with the continuing popularity and the increasing transfer of the paradox lens. Considering and articulating these risks aims at preventing paradox research from stepping into path-dependencies and to continue contributing to social and ecological transformation. Furthermore, the reflection on dominant key assumptions stresses the importance of a more transparent and mindful explication of the underlying assumptions which is central for a meaningful comparison of findings in paradox research and for the identification of research gaps. Finally, the paper fosters theoretical development by contributing to the integration of currently divergent research streams such as the ‘dark sides’ of paradox into the debate and argues for a more holistic perspective in the paradox discourse by focusing on the interconnectedness of assumptions made at different levels of analysis.

Keywords: Paradox theory, problematization, critical perspective

INTRODUCTION

Now, more than ten years ago, Smith and Lewis (2011) published their highly influential paper “Toward a Theory of Paradox: A Dynamic Equilibrium Model of Organizing”, which has been cited more than 4.000 times and won the Academy of Management Review Decade Award. Since then, paradox research has flourished and became an integral part in organization and management studies. Paradoxes are considered to be ubiquitous, “a pervasive characteristic of organizational life” (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017: 386), and its management the “ultimate advantage and challenge for organizations” (Andriopoulous & Lewis, 2009: 709). However, at the same time, the growing significance and proliferation has contributed to an increasingly diverse research field, leading to a “lack of conceptual and theoretical coherence” (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 382). Some authors even raise concerns about the development of a “dominant logic, which will ultimately hinder conceptual development and result in its downfall” (Schad et al., 2018: 107) and argue that the success of paradox theory might lead into path-dependencies (Cunha & Putnam, 2017). Increasingly, the debate becomes subject to centrifugal forces, challenging the theoretical underpinning of paradox research. The vast majority of paradox researchers build on Smith and Lewis’ (2011: 382) definition of paradoxes as “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time” and assume that the embracing of paradoxes finally leads to long-term sustainability and organizational success. However, contrasting ideas about the identification and management of paradoxes are about to emerge. Especially the ‘dark side’ of paradox debate (e.g. Berti & Simpson, 2021; Gaim et al., 2021) that has been gaining a lot of traction lately challenges some of the dominant assumptions in the field. Particularly the assumption that paradoxes can be successfully mastered by skilled managers who are able to embrace paradoxes is called into question. Currently, these contrasting perspectives are categorized as addressing the ‘dark side’ of the debate, but the underlying reasons that underpin this perspective are not systematically explored. It is hence the aim of this paper to foster theoretical development by engaging in a rather emancipatory and provocative way of theorizing (Cornelissen et al., 2021). The paper systematically surfaces the dominant key assumptions that are underpinning the current paradox debate and sheds light on the commonalities, differences, and contradictions of these perspectives. On the one hand, this approach should help to reveal problematic but influential assumptions that might hinder conceptual development or even lead to path-dependencies preventing social and ecological transformation. On the other hand, the approach aims at triggering novel research questions that have the potential to move beyond the dominant idea of embracing paradoxes to achieve sustainable solutions.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: First, I present the perspective of emancipatory theorizing (Cornelissen et al., 2021) and the approach of problematization (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, 2020). Second, I explore three areas of dominant key assumptions referring to the ontology of paradoxes, their exposure and management as well as the perceived superiority of ‘both/and’ approaches. In the next step, I aim at questioning these assumptions by formulating contrasting ideas and perspectives. Building on these critical reflections allows me to shed light on different and currently neglected research questions contributing to the development and reformation of the research agenda of paradox theory.

IDENTIFYING AND PROBLEMATIZING MAIN ASSUMPTIONS OF PARADOX THEORY

Given the growing interest in the paradox debate, different approaches have been made to summarize and structure the heterogeneous research area. Reviewing 20 years of paradox literature, Smith and Lewis (2011) provide a classification of four types of organizational tensions – learning, belonging, organizing, and performing – and their mutual relations. The Academy of Management Annals featured two meta-theoretical papers on paradox research presenting different but complementary perspectives on the current debate (Putnam et al., 2016; Schad et al., 2016). In addition, numerous special issues (e.g. Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 2014; Organization Studies, 2017; Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 2019; Journal of Management Inquiry, 2021) as well as handbooks and anthologies (e.g. Bednarek et al., 2021; Smith, Jarzabkowski, Lewis, & Langlely, 2017a) have been published.

In contrast to these approaches, this paper does not aim at making a further attempt to summarize the paradox debate; instead its main focus is on questioning the assumptions and the associated risks of this prolific research area. Applying a critical and provocative lens to existing systems of belief builds on the practice of emancipatory theorizing (see, e.g., Janssens & Zanoni, 2021; Spicer, 2020). Recognizing “the historical and social nature of our theoretical knowledge” (Cornelissen et al., 2021: 11), emancipatory theorizing aims at revealing dominant structures and implies a normative orientation which also affects the role of the researcher who is part of the respective research community but at the same time pursuing emancipation. The practice of questioning dominant, taken-for-granted assumptions within a research area constitutes the core idea of the problematization approach (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). Unlike systematic literature reviews, the problematization methodology focuses on a “more narrow literature coverage [...] with the specific aim of identifying and challenging the assumptions

underlying the specific literature domain targeted” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011: 256). In particular, the objective is to mitigate the hegemonic influence that often comes along with representative summaries of literature which tend to focus too much on the integration of ideas than on showing conflicts and fractures within scholarly debates (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020). For the identification of underlying assumptions, it is therefore important to cover influential papers whilst at the same time capture the breadth of a debate, hence “reading more broadly but selectively” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020: 1297). Next to identifying and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions of an existing body of literature, problematization aims at taking a provocative lens to develop novel avenues for research. Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) differentiate between five different types of assumptions: *In-house assumptions* are shared within the community and are accepted as unproblematic by their supporters; *root metaphor assumptions* describe images of a specific subject that influence and characterize a school of thought; *paradigmatic assumptions* comprise methodological, ontological, and epistemological assumptions of a research area; *ideology assumptions* present normative positions on subjects such as politics, gender, and moral; finally, *field assumptions* are common across different schools of thought, sometimes even across disciplines and contrasting paradigms. Alvesson and Sandberg’s (2011) categories of assumptions are not discrete entities but present a continuum and share interrelations. They hence may overlap and are sometimes difficult to distinguish. However, the typology offers a structured approach for the identification of assumptions and tactics to reveal what is “commonly seen as truths or facts” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011: 256). Using these techniques, I aim at articulating and critically discussing the core assumptions underlying the field of paradox research in order to develop contrasting perspectives. In the following, I will unpack three fields of assumptions that focus first, on the ontology of paradoxes, second, the way paradoxes are rendered salient and managed, and third, the perceived superiority of ‘both/and’ approaches.

The Ontology of Paradoxes

The first core assumption is concerned with the ontology of paradox hence presenting a paradigmatic assumption (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). The ontological debate about the nature of paradoxes still divides parts of the community and evolves around the question if paradoxes are “intrinsic to group life or [...] a social construction” (Quinn & Nujella, 2017: 7). The former idea that paradoxes present innate features of organizing and exist outside of individual agency or recognition focuses on paradoxes as “living within systems, structures, processes, and routines” (Smith et al., 2017b: 4). Following this perspective paradoxes are a

natural quality of human existence. In contrast, the assumption of paradoxes as a social construction relies on the idea that paradoxical tensions emerge “through the perception, language, and the behavior of individuals and collectives” (Schad, 2017: 36), being non-existent prior to actors’ recognition. This perspective therefore focuses on actors’ misinterpretation of the relation of opposing elements, their polarization, the influence of cognitive frames, sense making as well as contradicting norms and values (e.g. Michaud, 2014; Smith, 2014). The “limited cognition, abstracted discourse, and emotionally infused relationships create, exacerbate or diminish seemingly absurd oppositions” (Smith et al., 2017b: 5).

Smith and Lewis (2011: 388) combine these contradicting views by arguing that “opposing yet interrelated dualities are embedded in the process of organizing and are brought into juxtaposition via environmental conditions”. The perspective that paradoxes are inherent in systems *and* socially constructed at the same time is considered to be one of the “paradoxes of paradox” (Smith et al., 2017b: 1). Smith and Lewis (2011) explain that the act of organizing performed by actors itself creates a system of interrelated tensions. Consequently, the construction of organizations “inherently surfaces material paradoxical tensions” (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 389) that persist due to the complexity of systems. Hahn and Knight (2021) agree on conceptualizing paradox as both socially constructed and inherent by mobilizing the ontological foundations of quantum mechanics. The authors explain that paradoxes are co-constituted by inherent material factors and socially constructed meaning. The approach suggests that the socio-material context contains and shapes the potentiality for the enactment of organizational phenomena such as paradoxes by organizational actors (Hahn & Knight, 2021).

Even though the reconciliation of these contrasting ontological perspectives presents a true ‘both/and’ approach, the blending of ontological assumptions is not unproblematic. Schad (2017: 37) explains that “conceptualizing tensions as socially constructed or systemically inherent leads to very different research questions”. The contrasting perspectives of actors being the ‘true creators of paradox’ versus paradoxes being ‘out there in the world’, irrespective of what any actor speaks or does, have severe consequences. Understanding paradoxes as inherent to the world questions the role of paradox exposure. Paradoxes then are independent of an actor’s recognition and exist irrespective of their visibilization. Even though research can analyze how actors experience paradoxes and how their perception influences actions, the options how to respond to these paradoxes are very limited. Actors may accept, try to ignore or learn from ‘paradox encounters’ but cannot resolve them, since they cannot deconstruct paradoxes. In contrast, understanding paradox as a social construction significantly changes

these associated assumptions. If individuals and collectives are the ‘paradox creators’, paradoxes only come to existence by being exposed – or rather constructed. The characteristic of persistence, which is part of the definition of paradox (Smith & Lewis, 2011), highlights the consequences of the differing underlying assumptions: If paradoxes are inherent to the world, persistency would be redundant; if paradoxes are constructed and can be deconstructed, the persistence of paradoxes would be questioned in principal.

Moreover, the ontological understanding of paradox influences ‘doing paradox research’. Paradox studies apply a large variety of research methods such as action research (e.g., Pradies et al., 2020), longitudinal case studies (e.g., Heracleous & Wirtz, 2014), or surveys and scales (e.g., Keller et al., 2017; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). Regardless of the chosen method, the majority of literature assumes that researchers are generally able to identify and observe paradoxes. However, Andriopoulous and Gotsi (2017) argue that the researcher needs to reflect on the question who experiences or thinks the paradox – the scholar or the subjects under study. Assuming that paradoxes are inherent to the world, a researcher would need to account for the observation of contradictory but interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and are persistent (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The researcher then projects the paradox into an empirical setting, even though the participants do not necessarily recognize the observation as paradoxical. Scholars hence need to “remain detached, neutral and objective as they measure aspects of paradoxes, examine relevant evidence, and explore antecedents and consequences of these paradoxes” (Andriopoulous & Gotsi, 2017: 515). A multitude of papers follow this perspective and ‘detect’ paradoxes within organizations and industries and study their manifestation and coevolution (e.g., Ferdman, 2017; Heracleous & Wirtz, 2014; Iivonen, 2017; Jarzabkowski, Lê, & van de Ven, 2013). In contrast, assuming that paradoxes are socially constructed, researchers would need to study their research subjects’ paradoxical awareness, hence concentrating on the processes and practices by which individuals come to the perception of paradoxical tensions in the social world. This requires observing the practices of individuals that engage with alleged paradoxes through for example artifacts, language, and discourse (Putnam et al., 2016). Despite the far-reaching consequences of the different perspectives and the growing emphasis on the distinction of emic versus etic approaches in paradox research (Bednarek et al., 2021), Andriopoulous and Gotsi (2017) criticize that too many authors still fail in articulating transparently whether they project or elicit paradoxes.

Summarizing, challenging the ontological understanding of paradox reveals quite differing perspectives on actors’ and organization’s capability to engage with paradoxes. Assuming that paradoxes are inherent and, consequently, management options very limited, may lead to

problematic effects in practice since it legitimizes organizations' non-action and inertia in the face of pressing challenges such as climate change or social inequality. In contrast, perceiving paradoxes as social constructions centers the actors that engage in the processes of (de)constructing paradoxes. This perspective allows to shed light on the motives of actors to 'create' paradoxes, the role of power in paradox (de)construction as well as practices of (re)framing the characteristics of contradiction, interrelation, and persistence hence contributing to a broad avenue for future paradox research. However, regardless of the chosen perspective and its consequences, it is crucial to articulate the own ontological understanding transparently, since too many papers implicitly chose a side without reflecting on their ontological assumptions. Moreover, the ontological understanding also affects the differing role of the researcher in paradox studies and hence requires intense reflection and problematization of the underlying paradigmatic assumptions.

The Management of Paradoxes

A second set of impactful assumptions within the paradox discourse evolves around the idea that actors are able and willing to first, recognize paradoxes and second, to produce positive outcomes by the active and courageous management of paradoxical tensions. Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) define the unquestioned and taken-for-granted ideas and thoughts within a research community as so-called 'in-house assumptions', which are frequently hidden underneath shared vocabulary and commonly accepted narratives. One of these assumptions is the idea that paradoxes need to be rendered salient before actors can engage with them.

The main body of paradox literature assumes that paradoxical tensions are generally invisible to actors – they are “dormant, unperceived, or ignored” (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 390). Consequently, it is argued that only the occurrence of specific environmental conditions or cognitive abilities makes the contradicting, interrelated elements visible. Smith and Lewis (2011: 390) describe the conditions of “plurality, change, and scarcity” as factors rendering paradoxes salient, whereas Knight and Paroutis (2016: 404) stress that “environment is not enough to automatically trigger action” and that the visibilization of paradoxes depends mainly on leaders' practices. However, both perspectives place exogenous factors as the trigger of paradox exposure, highlighting the essential role of skillful actors in discovering paradoxes. The assumption implies that particular actors who are gifted with a so called 'paradox mindset' are capable of exposing paradoxes and presenting them to, for example, lower level managers (Knight & Paroutis, 2016).

This assumption needs to be problematized from different angles. First, the idea that the exploration of paradoxes rests on an actor's cognitive ability to think paradoxically is questionable. Do paradoxes only affect actors if they recognize them and are paradoxes therefore practically inexistent or even lack their *raison d'être* before they are actually surfaced? What about actors that are not able to think paradoxically, do they live and act in a paradox-free world? Or do latent paradoxes always implicate feelings of discomfort and trigger some kind of 'intuition of tension' that only can be articulated the moment the paradox is rendered salient? Moreover, questions arise from asking why paradoxes are invisible or "dormant" (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017: 437) for years. Can actors keep paradoxes invisible on purpose and if so, how? How can we understand why salient paradoxes become latent again? These questions point out that paradox management is more than establishing salience and overcoming latency (Knight & Paroutis, 2016). Challenging the assumption that paradoxes shift from the 'either/or' states of latency to salience, Tuckermann (2019) conceptualizes them as being integral to the process of paradox management arguing that paradoxes are in a process of constantly becoming. Contrary to the perception of a paradox remaining stable after being rendered salient, a strong process perspective (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) allows to conceptualize paradoxes as "a continual process of visibilizing and invisibilizing" (Tuckermann, 2019: 1869). This for example opens up the question on how to follow the moving of a paradox through an organization. Furthermore, Seidl et al. (2021) integrate Niklas Luhmann's systems theory perspective (Luhmann, 1984, 2000) in the paradox discourse and explain that it is not the visibilization of paradox that induces action, but on the contrary, displacing and concealing paradoxes generates a repertoire of action. These divergent thoughts question the stability of salient paradoxes and critically examine paradox exposure as a necessary condition for paradox management.

According to Smith and Lewis' (2011) equilibrium model of organizing, once paradoxes have been made salient, actors have different options how to respond to them: the first option describes defensive mechanisms such as repression and denial of the paradox leading into vicious circles. The alternative presents the accepting and embracing of paradoxes fueling virtuous circles. Smith and Lewis (2011: 392) further explain that paradox acceptance "provides a comfort with tensions that enables more complex and challenging resolution strategies". Since the consequences of the latter approach seem far more desirable than the emergence of vicious circles, it is not surprising that research has mainly focused on active paradox responses so far. The perspective builds on the taken-for-granted assumption that individuals and organizations can manage paradoxes in principle. Different terminologies such as 'coping with', 'navigating through' or 'mastering' are used to describe an actor's approach to handle paradoxical tensions.

Currently the majority of studies take a micro level perspective, focusing on individual coping with paradoxes (e.g., Calabretta et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2020; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018) as well as leadership practices for mastering paradoxes (e.g., Smith, 2014; Zhang et al., 2015). On the organizational level, literature discusses organizational capabilities for paradox management such as organizational climate (Törner et al., 2016) or the influence of supporting actors within organizations (Pradies et al., 2020). All these studies share the idea that actors are in general interested in and capable of implementing specific response strategies. However, a rather new stream in paradox literature focusing on the ‘dark sides’ of paradoxes questions this assumption. Among the first, Berti and Simpson (2021) criticize that the current body of literature overlooks power dynamics which heavily influence an actor’s ability to respond to paradoxes. They argue that due to material conditions such as resource access or hierarchical disparities, individuals frequently lack the option to respond to paradoxes in a legitimate way. Next to the argument of power imbalances, Gaim et al. (2021) find that actors sometimes only present the illusion of successful paradox management instead of actually mastering the paradoxical tensions. Therefore the authors “caution organizations and their members from overconfidence in their ability to embrace paradoxes successfully” (Gaim et al., 2021: 17).

The concept of a proactive paradox management is based on the idea that strategies of accepting and embracing paradoxes lead to positive outcomes on the individual as well as organizational level (Smith & Lewis, 2011). In particular it is recommended that leaders should develop a so-called ‘paradox mindset’ to first expose and finally unlock the potential of paradoxes (Knight & Paroutis, 2016). A paradox mindset is defined as “the extent to which one is accepting of and energized by tensions” (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018: 26). The ability to engage in competing demands simultaneously is supposed to set free resources and to enable restructuring that allows for flexibility and leads to resilience (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Empirical studies support this assumption by finding that individuals who successfully engage with paradoxes are more creative, innovative, and perform better (e.g., Calabretta et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2020; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Schneider et al., 2020). On an organizational level, research highlights positive outcomes such as competitive advantages (e.g., Fredberg, 2014; Heracleous & Wirtz, 2014), the initiation of change (e.g., Fredberg, 2014; Jay, 2013) as well as successful collaboration between organizations (e.g., Sharma & Bansal, 2017).

Challenging these findings, the positive effects of the proposed strategy to accept paradoxical tensions need to be scrutinized and questioned. On the individual level, the question arises whether competing demands and contradictory objectives necessarily produce creativity or increased performance but rather stress and resignation. Trying to embrace multiple conflicting

personal and organizational goals, which presents a common task for leaders, often constitutes a significant source of frustration (Carollo & Guerici, 2017) rather than of energy. In addition, even though leaders may recognize paradoxical tensions, lower level managers frequently experience them as absurd or confusing, confronting the individual with an unsolvable task (Czarniawska, 1997). Berti and Simpson (2021: 253) consider especially ‘pragmatic paradoxes’, which for example emerge when obeying an order means disobeying it at the same time, a “pathology, as they undermine individual self-efficacy and well-being”. Research in psychology quite prominently stresses that paradoxes trigger paranoid behavior, lethargic obedience, and therefore decrease engagement (Watzlawick, Jackson, & Bavelas, 1967). Moreover, contrary to the dominant perspective in literature, paradoxes can also produce conflict, myopia or standstill on the organizational level. Since paradoxes are often found to be nested in different organizational segments or levels, these tensions can present a major source of internal conflict. Gaim et al. (2021) discuss how embracing paradoxes discursively but not substantively triggers dysfunctional behaviors. They show how the approach contributes to the nesting of paradoxes within an organization “making the pursuit of paradox not a glorious transcendence of achievements but a potential trap reverberating across levels” (Gaim et al., 2021: 17). Weiser and Laamanen (2022) further argue that the proposed strategy of embracing paradoxes neglects the emergence of shifts and turns of paradoxes which can cause tensions to resurface in organizations in novel and unpredictable ways.

Moreover, examining literature more critically reveals that paradox responses which do not build on the embracing of opposing poles not necessarily result in vicious circles. Iivonen (2017) for example shows how projecting paradoxical tensions outside the organization supports the maintenance of legitimacy. By examining how Coca Cola handles the paradoxical tension between its core business and the social issue of obesity, the author reveals how Coca Cola shifts the responsibility to address obesity to the society (Iivonen, 2017: 323), which questions the need of an embracing strategy for successful paradox management. Positive outcomes on the organizational as well as individual level are hence not necessarily produced by following the dominant narrative of embracing paradoxes. In addition, taking a closer look reveals the actual plurality of approaches that actors engage with when encountering paradoxes, which shows how difficult it is to clearly distinguish between the dichotomy of active and defensive paradox responses. Considering a practice-based lens, paradoxes are constituted and responded to by everyday doings and sayings that unfold in the moment (Lê & Bednarek, 2017). Hence, response practices can build on a magnitude of entangled micro-activities that may encompass rather active as well as defensive activities.

To summarize, critical perspectives demonstrate that it is time to problematize the rosy image of the skillful paradox manager whose paradox mindset allows for the generation of positive outcomes and long-term sustainability. This idealization creates a critical two-class system of ‘enlightened’ leaders who are able to unpack the potential of paradoxes and ‘less gifted ones’ who may even lead their organizations into downward spirals because they are not able to embrace paradoxes. Building on these critical remarks about the process of paradox exposure as well as the ability of actors to respond to paradoxes proactively opens space for contrasting assumptions and novel research questions.

The Superiority of ‘Both/And’ Approaches

A third powerful assumption in the paradox discourse is the idea that ‘both/and’ solutions are superior to ‘either/or’ solutions. Following this assumption, organizational success depends on the ability to simultaneously address conflicting demands instead of just choosing between them. Smith et al. (2016) argue that leaders need to be able to manage for today and tomorrow, adhere boundaries and cross them, create value for shareholders and stakeholders, and act locally and globally simultaneously. Since “business organizations face increasingly unpredictable, complex, and challenging environments, those that have the greatest hope of surviving and contributing to the world will have leaders who embrace strategic paradoxes” (Smith et al., 2016: 70). The assumption that ‘both/and’ thinking leads to superior solutions also rests on the promise of novelty and (re)discovery cumulating in the metaphor of ‘yin yang’ as a representative of paradox. The ‘either/or’ logic attributed to the West is seen to present the ‘old’ worldview that needs to be overcome by the superior system of ‘both/and’ (Li, 2016). The symbol of ‘yin yang’ stands for balance and harmony and presents a so-called ‘root metaphor assumption’ – a metaphor or basic image that a research community applies to describe social reality (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). Smith and Lewis (2011: 386) use the image to differentiate paradoxes from dilemmas and dialectics, stressing that “paradox denotes elements, or dualities, that are oppositional to one another yet are also synergistic and interrelated within a larger system”. Peter Li (2016: 69) even argues that “Yin-Yang balancing is the only epistemological system that can truly accommodate and appreciate paradox”. Quinn and Nujella (2017: vi) conclude that “both/and thinking augurs well because it signals a certain maturity [...] and propels us toward wholeness via more holistic theories of management”.

Whereas the values of harmony, balance, and the overcoming of dualisms evoke positive associations, the assumption of the ‘both/and’ superiority portrayed by the yin yang metaphor has recently become a target for criticism (Cunha & Putnam, 2017; Li, 2014; Li, Worm, & Xie,

2018; Seidl et al., 2021). One line of thought derives from the introduction of core elements of Luhmann's social systems theory to paradox studies (Seidl et al., 2021). Building an epistemological argument, Luhmann (2000) explains that any observation relies on first drawing a distinction and then indicating one side of it. Whenever we want to study an object, we have to distinguish what we observe from everything that we do not observe. The construction of the social world is only possible through distinctions that we mobilize in our observations; we therefore have to make 'either/or' decisions, or as Luhmann (2006: 43) puts it: "Draw a distinction, otherwise nothing will happen at all. If you are not ready to distinguish, nothing at all is going to take place." Seen from this perspective, not deciding between two elements but choosing the 'both/and' perspective is hence not only inferior to 'either/or' approaches but also impedes the ability to act. Moreover, Li (2014) and Li et al. (2018) state that the yin yang frame presents neither a holy grail nor superiority to different logical systems or cognitive frames for paradox research. Li (2014: 7) explains that the West has a long tradition of dialectically thinking referring to Hegel, Niels Bohr, and Aristoteles and stresses that the "Yin-Yang philosophy, while useful and powerful in some situations, is not always superior to the other logical systems and philosophies". Li (2014) as well as Cunha and Putnam (2017) further criticize that the logic of yin yang and the philosophy of 'both/and' approaches tends to put too much focus on the interrelatedness and complementarity instead of the contradiction of elements. Cunha and Putnam (2017: 97) further question the dualism of 'either/or' and 'both/and' approaches in general, arguing that "[i]n some cases, effective responses to contradictory demands entail a combination of either-or, both-and, and more-than approaches". Li (2014: 23) therefore concludes that a "discussion and debate about the true value of Yin-Yang" is urgently needed in the paradox discourse.

An implication that follows from the idea of the superiority of 'both/and' solutions is the call that areas of competing demands and complex tensions should be reassessed through the paradox lens. Despite the fact that the paradox debate in organizational scholarship presents a rather young research area, its influence is already quite visible. More and more disciplines are adopting the paradox lens to analyze phenomena of tensions, which frequently arise from strategic conflicts or contrasting institutional logics. For years, contingency theory has offered approaches to tensions building on the idea that organizations need to decide between conflicting poles by aligning with the external environment (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). The 'both/and' logic, however, introduces the alternative perspective that organizations should not choose between competing demands and logics but should meet them simultaneously (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Accordingly, the paradox lens has been used to reassess well-known fields of

tensions such as exploration and exploitation (e.g., Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Smith & Tushman, 2005), competition and cooperation (e.g., Keller et al., 2017; Stadtler & van Wassenhove, 2016) or social and financial mission (e.g., Iivonen, 2017; Sharma & Bansal, 2017). The paradox lens is increasingly promoted as a solution to so called ‘grand challenges’ (Ferraro et al., 2015), large-scale, complex problems, such as climate change or poverty. The paradox community approaches these fields by recommending the use of the paradox lens to reveal and explore the interconnectedness of global challenges (Jarzabkowski et al., 2022). The tackling of grand challenges involves a multitude of actors from different sectors, hence bringing together different interests, knowledge, and worldviews that can cause tensions and contradictions. Jarzabkowski et al. (2019: 126) argue that exploring paradoxes as a nexus of multiple shifting meanings allows researchers to study related paradoxes “rather than the current tendency to examine polarized dualities”. Perceiving complex challenges through a ‘both/and’ lens is hence promoted to scholars as well as practitioners, who are encouraged to develop a “productive and realistic relationship to both the contradictions and interdependencies that are fundamental to engaging with a grand challenge” (Jarzabkowski et al., 2019: 129). A recent example presents the ‘Paradox Research Community’s Response to COVID-19’ in the *Journal of Management Inquiry* (2021). Arguing that “COVID-19 [...] constitutes a ‘call-to-arms’ for us as paradox scholars” (Keller et al., 2021: 172), 42 researchers engaged in a collective approach applying the paradox lens to explore the tensions related to the pandemic and its consequences at the level of society, the organization as well as the individual within the organization. The project argues to rely on “the robustness of a paradox lens, and the opportunity to use this theory to help us unpack [...] tensions in our research and in our personal life” (Keller et al., 2021: 174).

However, the understanding that competing demands and complex tensions such as grand challenges need to be treated as paradoxes demanding informed actors who are willing to take the ‘both/and’ approach implies several risks. Whereas organizations can manage strategic tensions via structural, contextual, and sequential ambidexterity (O’Reilly & Tushman, 2013), paradoxes continue to be persistent and cannot be resolved. Furthermore, paradoxes can produce standstill and often leave the individual with no legitimate way to act (Berti & Simpson, 2021; Borch, 2011), while grand challenges request robust action (Ferraro et al., 2015). Tackling challenges that involve multiple stakeholders at different levels and different degrees of engagement requires clear responsibilities and orchestration that rely on ‘either/or’ decisions. For example, one needs to “decide who bears the cost and how these costs are shared in a multi-actor, multi-engagement model” (George et al., 2016: 1889). In addition, research shows that

‘both/and’ approaches frequently comprise the rhetorical embracing of paradoxes but no actual embracing of opposing poles (Gaim et al., 2021). This illusion of paradox mastery allows organizations as a study of the Volkswagen Diesel gate has shown, to maintain harmful business practices instead of contributing to the solution of global challenges.

To summarize, these findings show that the ‘both/and’ approach does not always constitute a panacea for competing demands and complex tensions but sometimes even a source of ‘wicked problems’ (Rittel & Webber, 1973). The possible interrelatedness and duality of ‘both/and’ and ‘either/or’ approaches as well as existing limitations of ‘both/and’ approaches demonstrate the need to question the taken-for-granted superiority of the ‘both/and’ approach and the associated yin yang metaphor. In addition, the promotion of the approach both to academics and to practitioners as well as the transfer of the use of the paradox lens to large-scale societal and ecological issues demands for a more critical perspective and special scrutiny.

DEVELOPING AN ALTERNATIVE RESEARCH AGENDA

Developing “a distinct alternative to the dominant mode of using the literature in a field” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011: 267), the process of problematization proposes the construction of novel and contrasting research questions as a final step. The following section refers to the three identified key assumptions and attempts to generate novel perspectives and research questions that aim at reforming the current paradox research agenda in a provocative but constructive way. Table 1 summarizes the problematization of the three key assumptions and presents a selection of the resulting consequences and research questions.

Novel Perspectives and Research Questions Arising from Challenging Ontological Assumptions

One of the dominant key assumptions underlying the paradox discourse is the idea that paradoxes are *both* socially constructed *and* inherent to social systems (Hahn & Knight, 2021; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Questioning this ‘blending’ of ontological perspectives allows us to take a second look and hence to reveal two opposing perspectives. Assuming that paradoxes constitute inherent features of systems and exist outside the control of actors renders the practice of rhetorical transcendence (Bednarek et al., 2017) and the deconstruction of paradoxes impossible. As a consequence, whenever actors encounter a paradox, they do not have the option to choose from a rich repertoire of responses but can only try to ‘get rid of the paradox’ in order to preserve their ability to act. Consequently, researchers can ask *which practices actors apply to shift away paradoxes temporally, spatially or along organizational levels; how these*

practices are framed and legitimized, and which effects result from these shifting practices. Taking into critical consideration that the assumption of paradoxes as inherent features of organizing may legitimize standstill, organizational inertia or reluctance to cooperate (Sharma & Bansal, 2017), pushes research towards exploring *how the perception of paradox as a categorical imperative hinders (social) change.* Second, following the assumption that paradoxes are not immanent to the world but socially constructed, i.e. created by the paradox response itself (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017) triggers questions about framing tactics and the role of actors' intentions. *For what reasons do actors frame tensions as paradoxes and how do they create the impression of contradiction, interrelatedness, and persistence? How are these characteristics constructed and maintained over time?* Moreover, the *question of power and actors' prerogative of constructing and deconstructing paradoxes* becomes prominent. Tuckermann (2019) further touches upon the question why literature mainly focuses on exploring how paradoxes are exposed instead of asking *how actors can render salient paradoxes latent (again).* Finally, it seems important to analyze how environmental conditions influence paradox perception. *Why are specific contradictions seen as paradoxes but sometimes just as areas of tension? What circumstances hinder/facilitate the (in)visibilization of paradoxes?*

Novel Perspectives and Research Questions Arising from Challenging the Positive Outcomes of Skillful Paradox Management

The majority of paradox research builds on the existence of a skillful paradox manager who is able to generate positive outcomes such as creativity, innovation, and resilience on the individual level (Calabretta et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2020; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018) as well as competitive advantages, change, and collaboration on the organizational level (Fredberg, 2014; Jay, 2013; Sharma & Bansal, 2017). However, critically questioning the actual influence of actors and assuming that embracing paradoxes can also produce negative outcomes allows for a novel perspective that results in alternative research questions.

One area of interest emerges from Berti and Simpson's (2021) debate on how power influences paradox responses. Whereas the objective to embrace conflicting poles on a strategic level may seem to benefit organizations (Heracleous & Wirtz, 2014), it may leave the individual overwhelmed and confused (Czarniawska, 1997). Hence, the question arises *how paradox embracing on the organizational level may harm employees and creates negative outcomes on the individual level.*

	Assumption(s)		Contrasting Assumption(s)	Consequences of Novel Perspectives	Examples of Novel Research Questions
The Ontology of Paradox	Paradoxes are inherent and socially constructed at the same time.	PROBLEMATIZATION	Paradoxes as social constructions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Paradoxes come to existence through the construction of actors, i.e. the paradox response itself. → Doing paradox research means to study the research subject's paradoxical awareness, i.e. the processes and practices by which individuals come to the perception of paradoxical tensions. 	<p>How and why do actors (de)construct the impression of contradiction, interrelatedness, and persistence?</p> <p>What role does power play in the (de)construction of paradoxes?</p>
			Paradoxes as inherent features of organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Paradoxes exist outside the control of actors, i.e. response options are very limited. → Doing paradox research means to account for the observation of contradictory but interrelated elements in research settings. 	<p>Which practices do actors apply to 'get rid of the paradox', e.g. by shifting paradoxes temporally, spatially or along organizational levels? What effects result from these shifting practices?</p> <p>How does the perception of paradox as a categorical imperative affect (social) change?</p>
The Management of Paradox	Latent paradoxes need to be rendered salient.	PROBLEMATIZATION	Paradoxes do not shift from latency to salience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Paradox management is not merely about establishing salience and overcoming latency. → The exploration of paradoxes does not rest on an actor's cognitive ability to think paradoxically. 	<p>How can actors keep paradoxes latent/render them latent again? How can hiding the paradox present a response strategy?</p> <p>How can paradoxes be conceptualized as constantly becoming?</p>
	Embracing paradoxes produces positive outcomes.		Actors are often not able to embrace paradoxes. Embracing paradoxes may lead to negative outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Due to material conditions, individuals frequently lack the option to respond to paradoxes in a legitimate way. → Trying to embrace conflicting goals often constitutes a significant source of frustration. → Externalizing tensions instead of embracing them can lead to sustainability and organizational survival. 	<p>How does the embracing of paradoxes on the organizational level lead to negative outcomes on the individual level?</p> <p>How do paradoxical tensions once they have been embraced, create a life of their own and wander through organizations outside the control of actors?</p> <p>How do organizations attempt to free themselves from paradox traps? How can third actors such as competitors deploy such traps strategically?</p>
The Superiority of Both/And Approaches	Both/and approaches are superior to either/or approaches.	PROBLEMATIZATION	Either/or decisions are essential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Either/or and both/and approaches do not present a dualism but a duality. → Prioritizing both/and approaches focuses too much on the interrelatedness instead of the contradiction of elements. 	<p>How do either/or decisions enable both/and approaches?</p> <p>Under what conditions are either/or solutions more advantageous?</p>
	Areas of competing demands and complex tensions should be addressed with a paradox lens.		The paradox lens creates "wicked problems".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Paradoxes can produce standstill and often leave the individual with no legitimate way to act, while grand challenges request robust action. → Both/and approaches frequently comprise the rhetorical embracing of paradoxes but no actual embracing of opposing poles. 	<p>How can both/and approaches stabilize systems of inequality or even legitimize non-action?</p> <p>What are the boundary conditions of both/and approaches?</p>

Table 1: Problematisation of key assumptions

Gaim et al. (2021) argue that paradox embracing can result in the nestedness of paradoxes within the organization and across levels. It seems hence critical to investigate, *how paradoxical tensions once they have been embraced, create a life of their own and wander through organizations outside the control of actors.*

Moreover, previous research provides insights how paradoxes harm organizations and can even lead to their death. Ashforth and Gibbs (1990) for example explain that organizations that attempt to defend their legitimacy may paradoxically find themselves confronted with an even greater decline in legitimacy. This self-promoter's paradox (Jones & Pittman, 1982) can result in organizational downfall. Taking up this perspective, one can explore *how organizations attempt to free themselves from paradox traps* but also investigate *how third actors such as competitors deploy such traps strategically.* Furthermore, assuming that paradoxes constitute an obstacle to the continuation of action and paralyze actors (Borch, 2011), which may force organizations into resignation, the thought comes close to trace historically *how organizational decline and death (Hamilton, 2016) is connected to paradox encounters.*

Novel Perspectives and Research Questions Arising from Challenging the Superiority of 'Both/And' Approaches

Ideological assumptions within the paradox debate claim that 'both/and' approaches are superior to 'either/or' solutions (Li, 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Questioning the perspective that contradicting demands and objectives can and should be met simultaneously, opens up an alternative and very promising research agenda. First, it seems important to analyze the consequences of emphasizing the embracing of conflicting elements as the ultimate goal. Solely focusing on reconciling contradictions could, however, repress conflict and disagreement, which present essential triggers for example for innovation and productivity (Landau, Landau, & Landau, 2001). Hence, the question can be posed, *how 'both/and' approaches can result in an enforced settlement of conflict and even lead to competitive disadvantages.* Moreover, Li (2014) presents numerous examples of situations in which individuals or organizations need to take decisions and should not prefer a 'both/and' solution. Referring to these findings one can ask *how implementing 'both/and' solutions and not taking 'either/or' decisions postpones problems and tensions that will pop up again eventually. How does shifting between poles trigger the consolidation of tensions within organizational as well as inter-organizational systems?*

In addition, it seems fruitful to further examine the relation of ‘either/or’ and ‘both/and’ approaches by conceptualizing them as a duality rather than a dualism (Farjoun, 2010). Hence researchers should for example *investigate how ‘either/or’ approaches enable ‘both/and’ solutions and how the approaches relate to each other over time.*

Furthermore, challenging the assumption that the ‘both/and’ approach helps to tackle grand challenges rises further questions. Focusing on challenges such as poverty alleviation and climate change highlights the question if you can really ‘have your cake and eat it’. The debate on philanthrocapitalism (McGoey, 2012) clearly shows that doing socially good and financially well at the same time is no revolutionary idea but relies on the perception of the moral value of capitalism, which promotes the creation of public good through individual economic enrichment. Following McGoey (2012), the ‘both/and’ approach hence fails its promise to ‘save the world’ (Bishop & Green, 2008) but rather constitutes a source of persistent inequality. Consequently, it is important to critically explore *the limitations and boundary conditions of ‘both/and’ approaches* in order to prevent paradox theory of becoming a complicit in the institutionalization and legitimation of dominant structures of inequality.

The contrasting perspectives on taken-for-granted assumptions within the paradox debate and the following construction of alternative research questions only present a selection which is by no means exhaustive. However, the posed questions highlight novel theoretical angles that call for more attention. First, the future research agenda of the paradox community needs to reassess the consequences of different ontological assumptions. Depending on alternative ontological assumptions, different questions arise and depict very different images of actors in regard to their possibilities and intentions. Consequently, the role of actors in exposing as well as responding to paradoxes needs critical attention. Moreover, questions about the ‘dark sides’ of paradoxes need to be taken more seriously, since they convincingly introduce the idea that embracing paradoxes can produce negative outcomes. Stressing this perspective shifts the focus to contradicting outcomes on different levels and temporalities since negative outcomes may appear on a different level of analysis or only become visible in the long run. Finally, questioning the rather rosy image of the ‘both/and’ ideology helps to investigate the boundary conditions of ‘both/and’ approaches and builds the ground to reevaluate the alleged inferiority of ‘either/or’ solutions.

CONCLUSION

Paradox theory has become a very popular lens in the current management literature and gains more and more significance within the community but also beyond its borders. Whereas several papers provide meaningful insights by summarizing and systematizing the debate (e.g., Putnam et al., 2016; Schad et al., 2016; Schad et al., 2018), this paper aims at critically questioning the underlying assumptions of paradox literature. Engaging in emancipatory theorizing (Cornelissen et al., 2021) and the method of problematization (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, 2020), I challenge and question relevant assumptions that inform the debate but at the same time are constantly reproduced by the literature. Critically reflecting on these commonly held assumptions allows to develop contrasting perspectives and to construct novel research questions that aim at reforming and extending the future research agenda of paradox theory. Critically reexamining topics such as the role and influence of actors or the ideological superiority of ‘both/and’ approaches challenges unquestioned beliefs and at the same time stresses the importance of a transparent communication of assumptions. So far, many papers only implicitly assume that, for example, paradoxes are socially constructed or that paradox embracing leads to positive outcomes. However, these assumptions need to be exposed explicitly since they are crucial when deciding which research questions can be asked (Andriopoulous & Gotsi, 2017). If one assumes that paradoxes are inherent to the social world and exist outside the control of actors, it does not make much sense to ask how actors practice paradoxical resolution. Moreover, the assumption is connected to the level of outcomes that are produced by paradox responses. If actors are not able to engage with paradoxes, they cannot influence response outcomes either. Furthermore, communicating assumptions transparently is essential when comparing findings and evaluating research gaps. We frequently tend to compare findings that arise from papers sharing a common topic, such as for example ‘sustainability paradoxes’ (see, e.g., Hahn, Figge, Pinkse, & Preuss, 2017; Hahn & Pinkse, 2022; Schrage & Rasche, 2021; Sharma & Bansal, 2017); however, if papers build on different or even conflicting assumptions we may run into the danger of comparing apples and oranges. Moreover, the risk of pooling together seemingly similar research without evaluating the compatibility of their assumptions can lead to the over- or underestimation of specific research gaps. Finally, questioning dominant assumptions helps to explain the emergence of deviating research streams such as the ‘dark sides’ of paradox discussion. Questioning in-house assumptions such as the idea that actors are able to manage paradoxes and that embracing paradoxes results in positive outcomes shows that more and more authors challenge the

status-quo. Instead of framing the debate as contradicting or even outcasting it to the periphery, problematization allows us to integrate diverging perspectives, since they present just the other side of the coin.

Finally, considering the increasing significance of the role of organization and management studies in tackling grand challenges, demands for the critical examination of the alleged potential of paradox theory in this endeavor. The assumption that paradox theory is capable of processing high levels of complexity and tension suggests the use of the paradox lens in developing solutions for large-scale societal problems such as climate change. However, critically accessing taken-for-granted assumptions within the discourse shows the risks that come along with conceptualizing the ‘both/and’ approach as a panacea for wicked problems. Frequently, pressing challenges demonstrate the importance of clear decision-making and demand for the weighting of poles which cannot be achieved simultaneously. In addition, the paradox lens can be misused to create loopholes that may legitimize non-action and the maintaining of the status-quo by framing a problem as an inherent and unsolvable paradox or by only rhetorically embracing the paradox but not substantially (Gaim et al., 2021). Current approaches (see, e.g., Munir, 2019) stress the importance and potential of taking a more critical perspective on dominant assumptions and practices within a school of thought in order to preserve its positive impact on society and to avoid institutionalizing unquestioned but potentially harmful narratives. Since paradox scholars in particular are capable of valuing opposing poles and are used to standing tensions, they surely can embrace both assumption and contrasting assumption simultaneously.

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Article III: Caught in a Trap: Media's Role in the Co-Creation of a Paradox of Legitimacy Repair

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the role of media in (failing) legitimacy repair processes. Using press articles, it builds on an analysis of the media discourse around the Berlin State Office for Health and Social Affairs (LAGeSo) during the so-called ‘refugee crisis’. Our findings reveal that the media, together with internal and external stakeholders, were co-constructing an internal and external transformation paradox which impeded legitimacy repair. These paradoxical tensions result from the medias’ ability to frame the alleged solutions to the surfaced problems as the source of new problems, which led to a vicious circle of failing legitimacy repair. This contributes first to the legitimacy literature by highlighting the role of media not as passive spectators but ‘failing agents’. Second, we contribute to paradox theory by arguing that paradoxes can be co-constructed by multiple actors and hence addressing them exceeds the capability of managers and focal organizations.

Keywords: Legitimacy repair, tensions, paradox, vicious circle, co-creation

INTRODUCTION

Increasing complexity, competing demands, and ambiguity within institutional environments (Lewis & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2014) renders the maintenance and (re)creation of organizational legitimacy more challenging (Kostova & Zaheer, 1999). De Vaujany (2019: 219) argues that the fragility of organizations' legitimacy has "made legitimation itself more open, more emotional and more problematic", hence shifting scholarly attention towards the problematic processes of legitimacy repair (Budd et al., 2018; Siltaoja & Vehkaperä, 2009). Literature on legitimacy repair not only focusses on specific repair strategies (Bachmann & Ingenhoff, 2016; Linsley & Kajuter, 2008; Long, 2016; Radtke & Fleischer, 2019; Wang, 2010) but increasingly acknowledges the role of media in repair attempts (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Deephouse & Suchman, 2013). Despite the far-reaching consequences of failing legitimacy repair such as the ultimate death of an organization (Hamilton, 2006; Sutton, 1987; Sutton & Callahan, 1987), relatively little is known about the active role of media in the creation of obstacles and tensions within the process of (failing) legitimacy repair (Suddaby et al., 2017: 462). In order to better understand the emergence of tensions that organizations aiming at repairing legitimacy have to deal with, research on organizational legitimacy recently started referring to paradox theory (Haack & Rasche, 2021). Commonly, paradox scholars argue that organizations dealing with paradoxical tensions need to accept and embrace these tensions in order to achieve long-term organizational legitimacy and to enter virtuous circles (Fredberg, 2014; Liu et al., 2020; Smith & Lewis, 2011). However, recent work on the 'dark sides' of paradoxes finds that actors are frequently unable to embrace tensions successfully due to power imbalances between the affected actors (Berti & Simpson, 2021). Combining insights from the influence of media on legitimacy repair processes and paradox theory shifts our attention first of all, to the role of media in repair processes and second, to the emergence of complex tensions within legitimacy repair which are difficult to manage. Building on these insights, our study aims at shedding light on the role of media in (failing) legitimacy repair processes and foregrounds how paradoxical tensions emerge and influence legitimacy repair processes.

To extend our insights, the paper builds on an empirical case study of (failing) legitimacy repair in the eye of the media, using the example of the State Office for Health and Social Affairs in Berlin (LAGeSo) during the so-called 'refugee crisis'. To better understand why legitimacy repair failed and the role of media in this process, we analyze newspaper articles that report about the legitimacy crisis and LAGeSo's attempts to repair its legitimacy. Our findings show how the media and internal as well as external stakeholders co-construct two paradoxical

tensions: the internal transformation paradox, and the external transformation paradox. By first framing a specific problem the organization needs to address and then framing the solution for this problem as the source of new problems, the media co-construct paradoxical tensions which the organization finds difficult to escape, which can explain the failing legitimacy repair. These findings allow us to make the following contributions: First, we contribute to our understanding of the role of media in failing legitimacy repair processes which goes beyond the perspective of media as passive spectators towards conceptualizing media as active ‘failing agents’. We further show that the object of legitimacy does not constitute a stable entity but is constantly changing as the result of the legitimacy repair process. Second, we contribute to paradox research by showing how paradoxical tensions can be co-constructed by powerful external actors and stakeholders that may even trap organizations into vicious circles. These insights allow us to argue that paradoxes which are co-created by multiple actors cannot be successfully addressed by one actor alone. This can explain why the successful embracing of paradoxes, as current paradox research suggests, is often not feasible and paradoxical tensions persist.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: First, we review research on failing legitimacy repair and point to the role of media in legitimacy repair processes. We combine literature on legitimacy repair with insights from paradox theory to better grasp the paradoxical tensions organizations find themselves in once aiming at legitimacy repair. We then introduce the case study of LAGeSo and our strategy of data collection and analysis. Third, we show the main findings from our case study and reveal the paradoxical tensions the media were co-constructing. Fourth, we discuss our findings in light of theory and carve out our theoretical contributions. Our paper concludes with theoretical and practical implications as well as limitations of our study.

THE PROBLEMATIC NATURE OF LEGITIMACY PROCESSES

(Failing) Legitimacy Repair

Meyer and Rowan (1977: 352) argued that organizational success does not primarily rely on the efficient management of work activities, but rather on incorporating “societally legitimated rationalized elements in their formal structure”, which renders the creation and maintenance of legitimacy as key for organizational survival. Commonly the legitimacy of an organization is defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995: 574).

Whilst legitimacy has often been understood as being a stable concept, “a property, resource or a capacity of an entity” (Suddaby et al., 2017: 451), more recent approaches bring the inherently temporal and contextual character of legitimacy to the fore (Haack & Rasche, 2021), pointing to a processual understanding of legitimacy (Suddaby et al., 2017). The legitimacy-as-process perspective (Suddaby et al., 2017) assumes that legitimacy is a process of continuous (re)constructing and maintaining. Whereas the maintenance of legitimacy constitutes a process that every organization is confronted with on a daily basis (Long, 2016), legitimacy repair only comes to the fore under specific circumstances, such as for instance loss of public trust (Samkin, Allen, & Wallace, 2010), corruption scandals (Blanc, Cho, Sopt, & Branco, 2017), or public attacks and critical revelations (Elsbach, 1994). Following Suchman (1995: 597), repairing legitimacy can follow three distinct strategies: “(a) offer normalizing accounts, (b) restructure, and (c) don’t panic”. Existing research has pointed to different repair strategies such as offering verbal accounts (e.g., Bentley, Oostman, & Shah, 2018; Elsbach, 1994; Patriotta, Gond, & Schultz, 2011; van Laer & de Ruyter, 2010; Verhoeven, van Hoof, Ter Keurs, & van Vuuren, 2012), the use of strategic silence (Le, Teo, Pang, Li, & Goh, 2018), report disclosures (e.g., Bachmann & Ingenhoff, 2016; Blanc et al., 2017; Linsley & Kajuter, 2008), restructuring measures (Radtke & Fleischer, 2019; Wang, 2010), symbolic distancing (Pfeffer, 1981) as well as the building of alliances (Svensson, Udesen, & Webb, 2019). However, despite the existence of numerous repair strategies, research has shown that sometimes organizations still fail to repair their legitimacy and that repair processes are often problematic and involve dealing with a multitude of actors (de Vaujany, 2019; Haack & Rasche, 2021; Suddaby et al., 2017). Studies on failing repair processes reveal various empirical cases, such as the energy group “Enron” or the airline “ValuJet,” in which organizations were not successful in their attempts to repair legitimacy (Hamilton, 2006). Since legitimacy is crucial for the survival of organizations, failing attempts to repair legitimacy are associated with the ultimate death of the organization (Hamilton, 2006; Sutton, 1987; Sutton & Callahan, 1987).

The Role of Media in Legitimacy Repair Processes

In the context of organizational legitimacy, the role of media attracts increasing scholarly attention (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). Media are generally discussed as an indicator as well as a source of legitimacy (Deephouse & Suchman, 2013). On the one hand, media function as an important indicator of legitimacy, since media select what and how it is reported about organizations (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975). Hence, media data have been frequently used to measure legitimacy (e.g., Deephouse, 1996; Etter, Colleoni, Illia, Meggiorin, & D’Eugenio,

2016; Lamertz & Baum, 2009; Pollock & Rindova, 2003; Schultz, Marin, & Boal, 2014). On the other hand, media “are routinely targeted by organizations [...] seeking to build or repair legitimacy” (Deephouse & Suchman, 2013: 56), hence providing an essential source of legitimacy. Following Bitektine and Haack (2015), media are a dominant actor in addressing the macro level of legitimacy. Recent studies stress the influential role of media by showing how media favor specific arguments in legitimacy discourses (Tiainen, 2017), construct the illegitimacy of certain business practices (Siltaoja & Vehkaperä, 2009), or even cause the de-legitimation of entire industries (Budd et al., 2018).

Notwithstanding the prominent role of media in legitimacy research (Deephouse & Suchman, 2013), only little attention is paid to their role in complex legitimacy repair processes that involve dealing with multiple tensions or even trigger downward spirals (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). Vaara, Tienari, and Laurila (2006: 789) stress that media constitute an “important but still not very well-known legitimating arena [...]”. So far research mainly focuses on media as an “information intermediary” (Pollock & Rindova, 2003) that can be targeted by organizations to communicate their legitimacy claims, or information on media discourses is used to measure legitimacy levels (Deephouse, 1996). But, as Suddaby, Bitektine, and Haack (2017: 462) point out, the current legitimacy discourse tends to marginalize collective actors such as media, by differentiating between “actors” who execute agency and “audiences” that are degraded as simple perceivers of legitimacy. However, understanding media as “passive spectators” in legitimacy processes overestimates the role of organizations and underestimates the role of media in complex legitimacy processes (Suddaby et al., 2017: 462).

Despite the drastic consequences of failing legitimacy repair and the decisive role of media in these processes, research so far has only scarcely addressed the question why legitimacy repair may fail and which role the media play in this process. Ashforth and Gibbs (1990) are amongst the few who attempt to explain the phenomenon of failing legitimacy repair by introducing the so-called “self-promoter’s paradox”. They argue that defending legitimacy by any means and “protesting too much” arises suspicion by media audiences, which finally leads to decreasing legitimacy. The notion of the self-promoter’s paradox already reveals that the efforts organizations engage in to manage and repair legitimacy might be full of tensions which are difficult if not impossible to address. The process perspective on legitimacy already makes the important point that gaining and maintaining legitimacy requires organizations to address paradoxical tensions (Haack & Rasche, 2021). Seen this way, understanding legitimacy as a process immediately sheds light on the complex and inherently paradoxical nature of

legitimacy. As Haack and Rasche (2021: 19) argue, “[t]he presence of distinct and potentially conflicting sources of legitimacy clarifies that legitimacy itself needs to be theorized and empirically studied as an inherently paradoxical concept and *explanandum* in its own right.” Hence, the ability to deal with such tensions seems to be fundamental for our understanding of legitimacy repair processes of organizations. We therefore suggest integrating insight from paradox management into our understanding of (failing) legitimacy repair processes.

Paradoxical Tensions in Legitimacy Repair

Smith and Lewis (2011: 382) define paradoxes as “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time”. Following paradox studies, interrelated and persistent tensions are embedded and intrinsic to the process of organizing (Johnson, 2014; Papachroni, Heracleous, & Paroutis, 2014). However, whereas the paradox itself is oftentimes latent and unperceived, it shows up in forms of dilemmas, double-binds or catch-22 situations pressuring actors to make a choice in situations where choosing seems impossible (Smith & Lewis, 2022). It is assumed that an effective management of paradoxes implies embracing opposing tensions in the sense of finding ‘both/and’ instead of ‘either/or’ solutions (Smith & Lewis, 2011). A multitude of studies show that managers with specific cognitive capabilities are able to embrace paradoxes and arrive at ‘both/and’ approaches which lead to virtuous outcomes such as high performance (Lewis & Smith, 2014), competitive advantages (Heracleous & Wirtz, 2014), team improvisation (Abrantes, Passos, Cunha, & Silva, 2023) as well as creativity, innovation, and resilience (Calabretta et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2020; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Wilson, Barley, Ruge-Jones, & Poole, 2022). Consequently, whereas according to Smith and Lewis (2011) ‘both/and’ approaches are generally associated with positive outcomes and would hence enable organizations to successfully deal with tensions emerging from legitimacy repair, it is assumed that defensive responses to paradoxes such as ignoring or denying lead to vicious circles and would therefore impede processes of legitimacy repair.

However, first studies are indicating that embracing tensions to manage paradoxes successfully is often not that easy. In their study how Volkswagen dealt with the pressure of pursuing the contradictory goals of a green, cheap, and efficient car, Gaim et al. (2021: 17) find that Volkswagen only presented the illusion of successfully embracing the paradox of a clean Diesel combustion engine. Instead, Volkswagen was – at least internally – prioritizing the Diesel engine over emissions and hence mastered the paradox by publicly denying its existence (Gaim

et al., 2021). Building on these findings, the authors “caution organizations and their members from overconfidence in their ability to embrace paradoxes successfully” (Gaim et al., 2021, p.17). Iivonen (2017) further shows how, instead of the active embracing of paradoxical tensions, defensive response practices may lead to successful legitimacy management. By examining how Coca Cola handles the paradoxical tension between its core business and obesity as a social issue, the author reveals how Coca Cola, whilst acknowledging the tension, shifts the responsibility to address obesity to the society (Iivonen, 2017: 323), which questions the need of an embracing strategy for successful paradox management. In a similar vein, Berti and Simpson (2021) problematize that embracing paradoxes requires that all actors have equal power and access to the necessary material or hierarchical resources in order to arrive at a ‘both/and’ solution. However, specific actors might simply lack the acquired power to respond to paradoxical tensions in a productive way (Berti & Simpson, 2021) which would hence impede their ability to deal effectively with the tensions associated with legitimacy repair. Not being able to find a legitimate response to paradoxical tensions might hence contribute to vicious circles that are difficult to escape (Berti & Simpson, 2021).

Taken together, connecting insights from legitimacy repair, the role of media in repair processes, and paradox theory allows us to first, stress the importance of media in such repair processes and second, to unveil that legitimacy repair involves dealing with complex tensions that are difficult to address and present an ongoing and often unpredictable challenge for managers. First studies indicate that embracing paradoxical tensions in an effort to manage legitimacy issues is often not that easy, particularly if powerful actors such as the media are involved. However, we currently have a very limited understanding of the role of the media as powerful actors in legitimacy repair processes. In particular, understanding the role of media in addressing paradoxical tensions in such repair processes seems to be of utmost importance to extend our insights into why organizations often struggle or even fail to repair their legitimacy. Hence, our study addresses the following research question: *What is the role of media as a powerful actor in (failing) legitimacy repair processes and how do paradoxical tensions emerge and evolve within such a process?*

METHODS

Case Selection: LAGeSo Berlin during the ‘German Refugee Crisis’

Since public sector organizations strongly depend on their environment’s evaluation and face fragile and difficult to predictable legitimacy preservation (Meyer & Scott, 1983), they represent an ideal case for analyzing legitimacy processes. Therefore, this study builds on the crisis at the State Office for Health and Social Affairs (LAGeSo). LAGeSo oversees health and social affairs in the state of Berlin and is subordinate to the Senate Department for Integration, Labor, and Social Services. The authority subdivides into four departments, central services, health, public provision, and social affairs, the last department taking care of all refugee matters, including initial registration, medical care, accommodation, and service provision. In August 2016, the new State Office for Refugee Affairs (LAF) took over these responsibilities. The spin-off was part of several strategic decisions to respond to the rapidly increasing numbers of refugees entering Germany. During this so-called ‘refugee crisis’, the acronym LAGeSo became a metaphor for chaos, mismanagement, and overburdened authorities (Reimann, 2017). The case of LAGeSo describes one of the worst crises a German authority has ever suffered and has become a symbol of authority failure not only in Germany but worldwide (Eddy & Johannsen, 2015). Headlines such as “Failed City Berlin” or “Germany’s worst authority” show the scope of the legitimacy loss and the intensity of the media discourse (Prantl, 2015; Reimann, 2015). Whereas for-profit organizations might have experienced serious difficulties in providing resources for repair strategies (Hamilton, 2006), LAGeSo as a public authority received intensive support from the state government and was hence able to leverage substantial resources to address the chaotic situation. Finally, at the end of 2017, the media coverage slightly decreased and LAF and LAGeSo gradually disappeared from the headlines. However, the cooling-down period did not result from successful legitimacy repair but from the sharp decline of refugee numbers.

Data Collection

To analyze the media’s role in the process of failing legitimacy repair, the data collection is based on the media discourse of the legitimacy crisis represented by newspaper articles published during the crisis. Since legitimacy “is not something that can be claimed by organizations, but is instead something that is given” by specific sources (Massey, 2001: 156), the analysis of the medias’ perception of the organization and its actions is key. In addition, we focus on the perception of media because, like in other studies that focus on organizational

malpractices (Eberl, Geiger, & Aßländer, 2015; Gaim et al., 2021), it was impossible to obtain first-hand information from the affected organization. At the time of our study, it was not allowed for LAGeSo employees to speak openly to the media or engage with researchers to discuss matters of such high political delicacy without an official permission that was impossible to obtain. Since other studies have already pointed to the prominent role of media in shaping public discourse (Maguire & Hardy, 2009), we thus believe a focus on media coverage is promising for understanding how an organization aims at repairing its legitimacy in the eye of the public. In addition, focusing on newspaper articles allowed us to take a long-term perspective and cover the entire two-year period of the LAGeSo crisis. While even the international press commented on the scandal, German media did the main coverage.

Data Analysis

Given our research question, our unit of analysis was the media coverage of LAGeSo's operation during the time of the so-called 'refugee crisis'. Our data analysis unfolded in four steps. The first step presents the selection of newspaper articles reflecting a broad political spectrum of the German media landscape in order to control for potential biases. We collected articles from *Der Tagesspiegel* (TSP, liberal), *Berliner Zeitung* (BLZ, center-left) and *Berliner Kurier* (BK, conservative tabloid), which, as local newspapers, provided extraordinary deep insights into the crisis. Reflecting the national perspective, articles from *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ, center-left) and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ, center-conservative), both renowned daily newspapers of high-quality, were included. The articles were accessed via their online archives (SZ, FAZ) and the online database WISO (TSP, BLZ, BK). We selected articles published between May 2015, the early beginnings of the crisis, until the end of April 2017, when the official restructuring measures were implemented and refugee numbers declined. The keywords ["lageso" OR "Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales" OR "LAF" OR "Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten"] resulted in 1978 hits overall. First, we screened all hits by their title and/or abstract and excluded duplicates and false positives. We skimmed the remaining 638 articles on the basis of the following criteria: (1) only articles that reflected the medias' perception of the organization, its actions, and their evaluation were included in the dataset; (2) articles that reported about the 'refugee crisis' independently from the role of LAGeSo/LAF were rejected. Finally, the selection narrowed down to 527 records.

In a second step, engaging with the data more closely, rough contours of themes emerged from our discussions (Harrison & Rouse, 2014). First, the powerful role of media in the repair process

as well as the involvement of specific stakeholders of the organization became apparent and second, we noticed the role of emerging tensions the media were constructing. As a third step, we engaged in abductive coding (Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008) that was informed by legitimacy and paradox theory. Identifying potential sources of legitimacy in the repair process (Suchman, 1995), we paid particular attention to the way how internal as well as external stakeholders were quoted in the media and how they responded to the allegations. Moreover, in order to identify possible tensions, we focused on contradictory yet interrelated, and persistent tensions (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 382) in our data set and aimed at a more systematic analysis of the rough contours developed earlier. As a fourth step, we followed the formal coding procedure of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to understand how and why the identified tensions emerged as well as which stakeholders were important in the creation of these tensions. After the initial identification of first order codes in which we aimed to stay close to the original data, we organized them, as suggested by Corley and Gioia (2004), into second order themes based on similarities/dissimilarities. In the next step, we moved back and forth between our data, paradox theory, and legitimacy repair theory. This iterative processes between data and theory enabled us to distill two aggregated dimensions (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia et al., 2012) from our second order coding. Last but not least, we controlled for potential political biases of the newspaper outlets that were reporting about LAGeSo. Whereas the selection of newspaper articles covers the entire political spectrum, we could not identify any specific, systematic differences between the different media outlets and the way they were reporting about LAGeSo. Figure 1 gives an overview of the data structure and shows how the interpretation of data emerged from first order concepts to aggregated dimensions.

FINDINGS

As our analysis of data reveals, the media triggered a co-creation process of two fundamental paradoxes that can explain why LAGeSo ultimately failed to repair its legitimacy; namely a paradox of internal transformation and a paradox of external transformation. As our analysis of data shows, these two paradoxes give raise to what we have labeled a vicious circle of failing legitimacy repair. In the following, we first present the dynamics that underpin the internal transformation paradox, then we describe the emergence of the external transformation paradox and finally we summarize the key processual dynamics that can explain the failing legitimacy repair process.

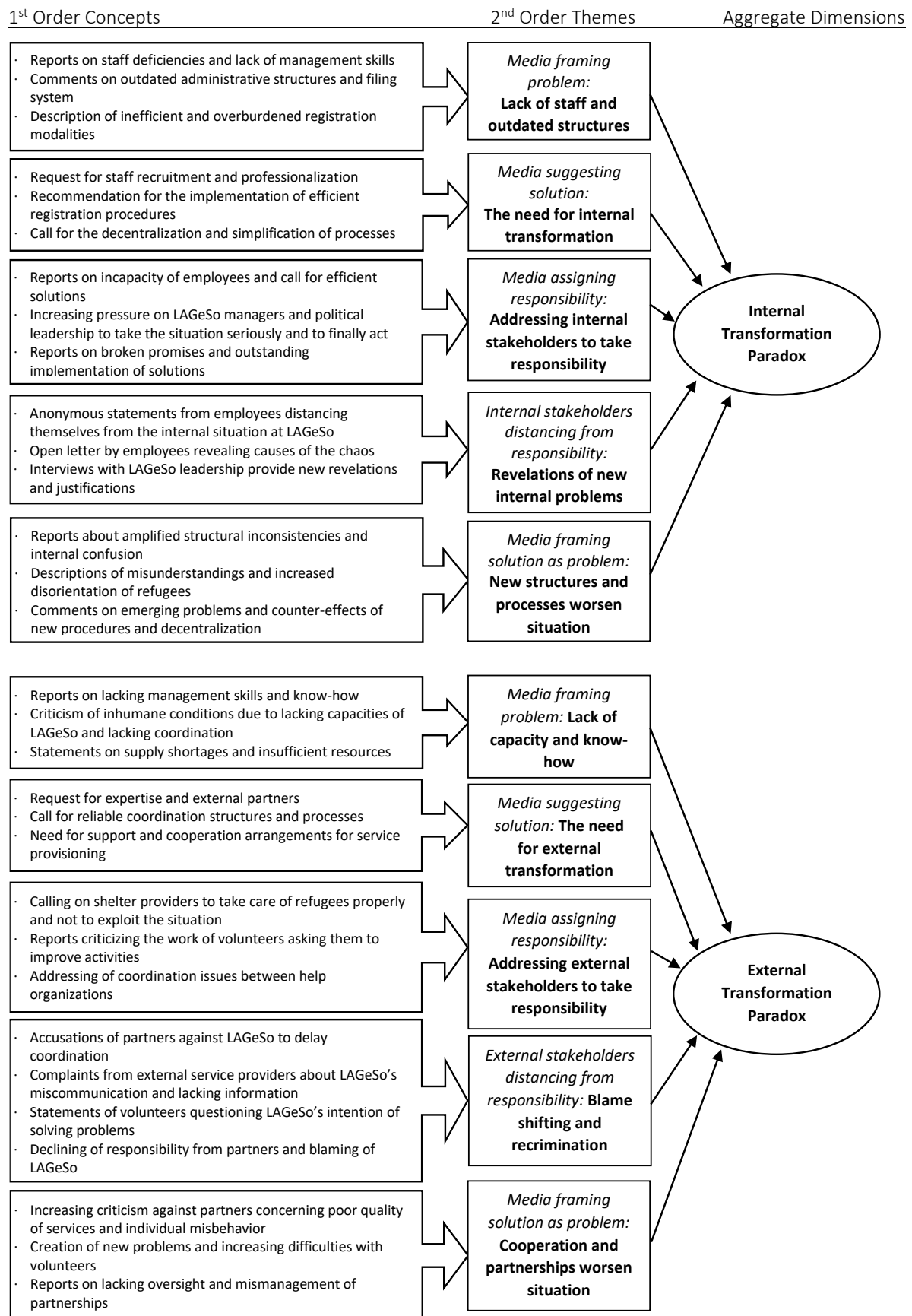


Figure 1: Data structure

Internal Transformation Paradox

A fundamental paradoxical tension which our data analysis uncovered centered around the strong call that LAGeSo should quickly transform its internal structures to re-establish an efficient and effective service provisioning. Media reports were consistently addressing the numerous problems of LAGeSo's internal structures and the media requested that LAGeSo takes immediate responsibility to implement solutions. These media allegations of inefficient structures triggered internal stakeholders such as employees and LAGeSo management to justify themselves and they started to anonymously report to the media and denied their responsibility for the mismanagement. However, these accounts revealed new information from inside LAGeSo which were not publicly known before. As we can show, the media then used this new information to point to new problems and insufficiencies, thereby framing the initial measures LAGeSo undertook to address the problems as the source of new problems. We labeled the emerging tension as "internal transformation paradox".

Media framing problem: Lack of staff and outdated structures. In the eye of the media, one main driver of the crisis were the inefficient and outdated internal structures of LAGeSo. In particular, articles reported about poor personnel structures as well as the malfunctioning filing system. As the "Tagesspiegel" pointed out, understaffing was one of the key problems of the authority:

"The authority is heavily understaffed [...]. Due to cost saving reasons, LAGeSo has not replaced vacant positions for years, even though they should have created new positions." (TSP, 19 June 2015, p. 8)

Moreover, articles reported about the apparent lack of management skills of the current staff of the LAGeSo:

"For decades, Berlin's administration has failed to develop management skills. The bad organization of administrative processes at the LAGeSo is by no means the exception, but has now become particularly visible." (BLZ, 8 January 2016, para. 2)

Apart from staff deficiencies and lacking management skills, the administrative structures and the outdated filing system that still heavily relied on paper-based documents, were framed as a key problem:

"Further allegations against the authority are 'incomplete files, lacking training and deficient structures'." (BK, 30 November 2016, p. 13)

Another area that was heavily scrutinized by the media and framed as a key concern was the registration process of refugees, one of the main tasks of the LAGeSo. Consistently, the media described the registration modalities as inefficient and overburdened, leading to unbearable waiting time for the refugees and gaps in the registration. The “Berliner Zeitung” for example used the case of a specific refugee “Amar” to illustrate the cumbersome registration process:

“Day after day, Amar gets up at 3 am to line up in front of the LAGeSo. He has a waiting batch for weeks now. His number has not been called out yet. [...] The registration chaos is self-imposed by the authority. Amar could get to a refugee shelter at night with one of the LAGeSo buses, but how will he return at 3 am to line up again? [...] The registration at LAGeSo is the main problem.” (BLZ, 30 September 2015, para. 1–4)

Another issue that was framed as a severe problem was the accommodation of refugees that was administered by the authority. The strict rules and procedures LAGeSo followed in administering accommodation were heavily criticized by the media. The newspaper “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” wrote:

“The inflexible procedures of the German bureaucratic system became a problem. [...] There are stories that the authority refuses to accommodate refugees in empty apartments since they are officially ‘too small’. In contrast, they must not be ‘too expensive’, even though apartments are in general much cheaper than hotels or hostels.” (FAZ, 29 September 2015, p. 4)

Taken together, the media framed the internal structures and organizational processes as well as the number and qualification of the staff as key problems of the authority.

Media suggesting solution: The need for internal transformation. However, media did not only frame the number and qualification of staff and cumbersome structures and processes as key problems, but most articles also came up with suggestions and recommendations on how LAGeSo should address these problems. The newspaper “Tagesspiegel” for example suggested that new permanent staff needs to be recruited and a new filing system is needed:

“First, the outstanding questions regarding organization, personnel, and structures need to be solved [...]. The authority must involve the permanent staff at all management levels and distribute new employees evenly [...]. Moreover, they must implement a new registry to stop wasting time and staff for searching documents.” (TSP, 17 December 2015, p. 10)

The “Berliner Zeitung” outlined that a new computer system would be of utmost importance to replace the paper-based filing system:

“They need to bring back order and develop efficient procedures. Computer systems need to be standardized and files digitalized.” (BLZ, 11 December 2015, Title)

The newspaper “Tagesspiegel” quoted a manager from the NGO Caritas suggesting changes to the cumbersome registration process:

“Caritas explains that the registration process needs to be changed. Instead of lining up in front of the LAGeSo, refugees should stay in the shelters and be registered on-site.” (TSP online, 14 October 2015, para. 3)

To reduce the waiting time for refugees, the “Berliner Kurier” suggested to decentralize the process of cash transfer to reduce the number of people that have to wait in front of the LAGeSo:

“Many refugees are waiting at the LAGeSo to receive pocket money or health insurance certificates. It is therefore essential to find solutions to handle the cost coverages digitally. Moreover, Berlin districts should distribute pocket money at the local shelters.” (BK, 3 December 2015, para. 8)

Summarizing, the media presented explicit solutions which the LAGeSo was supposed to take up in order to tackle the internal problems.

Media assigning responsibility: Addressing internal stakeholders to take responsibility.

While presenting solutions to tackle the problems at hand, the media thereby held internal stakeholders (employees and managers) to be accountable for the problems and to take responsibility to implement the suggested solutions. A journalist of the “Sueddeutsche Zeitung” addressed the alleged powerlessness of employees and questioned their capability to realize the solutions:

“LAGeSo employees are totally overburdened and at the end of their tether. [...] Even if they hire new staff and despite all the overtime hours they will not be able to handle the masses.” (SZ, 8 August 2015, p. 6)

The “Tagesspiegel” not only reported about the seemingly shocking circumstances at LAGeSo but also increased the pressure on the employees to take responsibility and to finally deliver solutions:

“A visit to the premises is a frightening experience, especially in a country that is famous for its efficiency. LAGeSo has become an anti-brand. A disaster. [...] The pressure on the employees is growing and growing. What is going on inside the LAGeSo?” (TSP, 5 January 2016, p. 3)

Apart from focusing on the LAGeSo employees, media were also mounting the pressure on the LAGeSo managers and political leadership of the authority to take the situation seriously and to take responsibility. Especially the Senator for Social Affairs, Mario Czaja, became the center of media attention. Posing rhetorical questions, an article from “Sueddeutsche Zeitung” implies that the senator deliberately ignored warnings about the scope of the crisis and even prevented important measures:

“There are new and pressing accusations against Senator Czaja: Did he ignore explicit warnings from within the LAGeSo? Did he even impede the building and expansion of refugee shelters in order to please fellow party members?” (SZ, 19 December 2015, para. 1)

The “Berliner Zeitung” further attacked the Senator by alluding to broken promises:

“Senator Czaja promised six new refugee shelters [...], he only finished two – it was the fault of complex tender procedures. He promised fast vaccinations for refugees. It took months – of course, since there were no rooms nor staff. He promised to motivate the employees at LAGeSo – it is a fact that leadership is chronically ill and staff absent. He promised to hire experts – he sent 12 interns.” (BLZ, 6 June 2015, para. 2)

Likewise, a reporter of “Sueddeutsche Zeitung” increased the pressure on the LAGeSo leadership by highlighting that the announced solutions had not been implemented yet:

“There are a lot of allegedly good intentions and many announcements about improvements from the LAGeSo leadership but nothing has been realized.” (SZ, 26 November 2015, p. 6)

These findings show how the media not only framed the solutions LAGeSo should implement but also held the internal stakeholders accountable to deliver on these solutions. However, these calls to take responsibility triggered the internal stakeholders to distance themselves from the medias’ accusations thereby revealing new information from inside the organization.

Internal stakeholders distancing from responsibility: Revelations of new internal problems.

The increasing pressure on LAGeSo’s internal stakeholders to take on responsibility led to a feeling among LAGeSo staff that they needed to justify themselves against the accusations and to refuse responsibility for the chaotic situation. As the pressure was growing, more and more employees reported anonymously to the press. As our analysis shows, these anonymous reports by employees allowed the media even deeper insights into the functioning of the authority and

exposed yet unknown failures and vulnerabilities. For instance, the “Sueddeutsche Zeitung” quoted an employee explaining why new structures did not improve the situation:

“‘Nothing is ever thought through to the end.’ [...] An employee explains that every day more than 500 refugees are called in for an appointment at 9 am, although ‘we have known for weeks now that we can only handle about 200 cases per day.’ According to his superior, they must comply with a new guideline.” (SZ online, 8 December 2015, para. 3–4)

Responding to accusations around the overworked LAGeSo employees, the “Berliner Zeitung” quoted an employee in the following way:

“How are we going to cover all the weekend shifts? We do not even know who will work this Saturday and Sunday. Christmas will be a disaster. Are volunteers and security guards the only ones who will be here? No one knows anything.” (BLZ, 8 December 2015, para. 2)

Even after restructuring the LAGeSo and handing over the responsibility for refugee registration to the new LAF, criticism of the horrible conditions within the organization persisted and employees came up with an open letter to the LAF management, which the “Tagesspiegel” published:

“Obviously, the conditions for employees and refugees are still a catastrophe, reveals the letter written by employees to the Head of Office. [...] Many employees are heavily overworked which slows down the service processes significantly. ‘We want to support the refugees [...] but the only thing we can do is give a little comfort.’ Headaches, insomnia, and other illnesses are the consequence.” (TSP, 11 November 2016, p. 9)

Not only the employees, but also the management and the responsible politicians felt the need to respond to the call to take responsibility, thereby providing even worse insights into the actual situation at the LAGeSo. The “Berliner Zeitung” quoted the President of LAGeSo:

“When asked about the existence of an emergency plan, President Allert smiles for a moment, and answers: ‘There is no plan, because there is no one who could develop a plan. We are actually open from 7 am to 7.30 pm, which public authority does that?’” (BLZ, 7 August 2015, para. 6)

The new LAGeSo President Muschter who replaced President Allert, also felt the need to distance himself from the persistent problems by explaining in an interview with “Berliner Zeitung”:

“The structures are outdated. Back in the days, a manager was responsible for 15 people, now it is 50 to 60. The heads of departments must train temporary workers, pensioners, and volunteers from other departments and introduce new processes at the same time. This cannot work.” (BLZ, 15 January 2016, para. 6)

These distancing efforts from internal stakeholders such as employees and the LAGeSo leadership allowed the media an even closer look inside the authority. These new insights revealed persistent deficits and unintended consequences of the supposed improvements.

Media framing solution as problem: New structures and processes worsen situation. Building on the disclosure from internal stakeholders, media presented the alleged solution of internal transformation of the LAGeSo as non-sufficient, even framing it as being worse compared to the original problem.

For example, newspapers took up the statements of employees on the internal chaos and problems caused by the hiring of new staff. The “Tagesspiegel” framed the efforts of LAGeSo to recruit new employees from different authorities to address the problem of lacking staff as impeding the situation:

“In most of the cases the new employees will be of no help. On the contrary, LAGeSo needs flexible and reliable specialists, not people who are low-performing and seem to be dispensable at their own departments.” (TSP, 22 December 2015, p. 2)

In a similar vein, the “Berliner Kurier” criticized the lacking qualification of the new staff and highlighted the time-consuming process of training them:

“The LAGeSo hired many people from temporary employment agencies. They have no qualification and it takes a lot of time and energy to train them.” (BK, 11 December 2015, para. 1)

The “Tagesspiegel” framed the newly introduced processes as worsening the situation, now producing gridlocks and delays:

„The introduction of new working groups which were supposed to relieve the LAGeSo worsened the authority’s work. [...] New internal procedures cause confusion about who is responsible and paralyze the authority.” (TSP, 12 December 2015, p. 16)

Furthermore, revelations by LAGeSo staff provided insights about the new procurement procedures introduced by the LAGeSo. Several articles described delays and potential fraud as unintended effects of the new procedures:

“LAGeSo is in a difficult position due to their tendering policies. Whatever they do is wrong. Since criticism arose that many accommodation contracts were faulty, they now must double check – which slows down the processes even more.” (TSP, 8 June 2015, p. 8)

Next to the tendering procedures, the changes introduced by LAGeSo to streamline the registration process were heavily scrutinized by the media. An article by the “Tagesspiegel” reported that refugees were lacking trust and compliance in these new, decentralized procedures:

“Many refugees do not trust the announcement that mobile registration teams will now come to the shelters. Instead, they prefer sleeping in the park next to LAGeSo to be first in line the next morning which impedes the implementation of new procedures.” (TSP, 9 September 2015, p. 7)

In a similar vein, the “Tagesspiegel” described how new guidelines at the LAGeSo premises caused unintended, negative effects:

“A new guideline allows women and children to enter the waiting tents first at nighttime. It is not surprising that men now bring their women and children with them to get in faster.” (TSP, 14 December 2015, p. 8)

External Transformation Paradox

Next to the internal transformation paradox, our data analysis uncovered a second paradoxical tension that contributed to the failing legitimacy repair which we have labeled as “external transformation paradox”. In contrast to the internal transformation paradox, this tension points to the medias’ call that LAGeSo should engage in collaborations with qualified external agencies to address their shortcomings on the one hand, and to the media then framing these partnerships as the locus of a loss of control on the other hand.

Media framing problem: Lack of capacity and know-how. With the scope of the ‘refugee crisis’ becoming more and more obvious, the media framed the LAGeSo as totally overwhelmed with the magnitude of the task at hand. According to the media, LAGeSo was lacking the capacity as well as the competences to solve the crisis on its own. As for example, the “Sueddeutsche Zeitung” and the “Berliner Zeitung” reported:

“LAGeSo is a public authority, not a refugee camp. The area and the facilities are not set up for such a situation.” (SZ, 8 August 2015, p. 6)

“They [LAGeSo] are lacking staff and most important, expertise [...]. Obviously, the know-how needs to come from outside the organization.” (BZ, 19 November 2016, p. 11)

Moreover, newspapers published pictures showing not only the terrible situation of the refugees but also the conditions of desperate LAGeSo employees. The “Tagesspiegel” described such a picture as follows:

“You see exhausted, desperate LAGeSo employees at the premises. They suffer from the overload of work.” (TSP, 9 August 2015, p.10)

A journalist of the “Berliner Kurier” summarized:

“The authority is operating to the limits of its capacity.” (BK, 1 December 2015, para. 1)

These findings show how the media consistently framed the LAGeSo as a failing and powerless public authority that is completely overwhelmed with its tasks and hence responsible for the unbearable conditions amongst refugees as well as their own employees.

Media suggesting solution: The need for external transformation. Whilst the media were framing the lack of capacity as a key problem of the LAGeSo, they at the same time pointed to the need for external transformation to overcome the deficits by forming alliances, collaborating with service providers, and by establishing a central coordinating body. The media suggested that LAGeSo should collaborate with the district governments and volunteer initiatives to jointly address the problems at hand. As the “Sueddeutsche Zeitung” wrote:

“‘Moabit hilft’ organized one of the most spectacular relief actions in German history. They gathered basic supplies overnight for thousands of refugees, built up a donation facility, and established a soup kitchen at the LAGeSo. The LAGeSo needs to cooperate with them [...].” (SZ, 23 September 2015, p. 11)

In a similar vein, the “Berliner Zeitung” reported that the LAGeSo shall ask for support by welfare organizations to streamline the registration process:

“The LAGeSo needs to ask all welfare organizations for their support. Without them, they will not be able to handle the registration of refugees.” (BLZ, 3 September 2015, para. 4)

Apart from volunteers and welfare organizations, the media also recommended that the authority should coordinate with professionals such as medical staff to ensure the treatment of refugees. The “Tagesspiegel” states:

“The LAGeSo urgently needs the support from doctors such as from the Charité, Europe’s largest university hospital. [...]. The Senator for Social Affairs needs to negotiate a contract with the Charité CEO.” (TSP, 21 October 2015, p. 10)

These findings show that the media coverage not only pointed to the lacking capacity of the LAGeSo but also presented a solution to the problem by framing the need to form alliances with external partners to support the service provisioning.

Media assigning responsibility: Addressing external stakeholders to take responsibility. By presenting the solution that the LAGeSo should collaborate with external partners to fix the problems, the media explicitly asked welfare organizations, volunteers, and service providers to coordinate with the LAGeSo and to support them with the implementation of new procedures and structures.

However, this call for responsibility frequently took a rather critical tone. For instance, articles called on external providers of refugee shelters to ensure the needed psychological expertise to treat the refugees. A reporter from the “Berliner Zeitung” visited a privately-run shelter and wrote about his experience:

„The people in the shelters are suffering and the providers need to act. More and more people suffer from depression and traumas are coming up. Problems with alcohol and drug abuse are increasing.” (BZ, 19 November 2016, p. 11)

Journalists critically evaluated the work of the shelter providers that cooperated with the LAGeSo. Articles described the bad conditions at the shelters and questioned the motives of private providers implying that they used the tragedy to make money.

“Washing machines and dryers have been donated to the shelter but the management failed to provide the water supply to install them. The hygiene conditions are unbearable [...]. The catering service only delivers packaged food which most of the time, is not ‘halal’” (TSP, 18 November 2015, p. 15)

„Opening a refugee shelter is a business case. People can earn a lot of money with it. Per refugee you receive about 15 Euro a day. A lot of national as well as international providers are trying to get into the Berlin market.” (BZ, 19 November 2016, p. 11)

Articles also frequently reported about how volunteers distributed donations in front of the LAGeSo. An article of the “Tagesspiegel” criticized the volunteers:

“The donation activities of volunteers need to be organized differently. They cause a lot of trash at the LAGeSo premises and lead to tumults among the refugees.” (TSP, 7 August 2015, p. 8)

The “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” questioned the quality of the donations made by private households:

“True to the motto ‘Refugees should be thankful for everything they get’, and ‘Let’s clean up the basement’ people donate trash such as broken toys or worn out baby clothes full of holes.” (FAZ, 21 August 2015, p. 4)

Next to assigning responsibility to private initiatives, the media also commented on the cooperation between external stakeholders, asking them to better coordinate their efforts. An article in the “Berliner Zeitung” reads as follows:

„On top of the exhaustion and all the trouble with the LAGeSo, there are more and more internal quarrels between different initiatives and welfare organizations. [...] Besides taking care of the refugees, the organizers need to coordinate their help and first of all, organize themselves.” (BLZ online, 13 November 2015, para. 5)

These findings show, that the media not only presented the solution of cooperation and partnerships but also explicitly addressed the external stakeholders to engage in the alliances and called on them to efficiently deliver their share of the solution.

External stakeholders distancing from responsibility: Blame shifting and recrimination. The call for taking responsibility and the increasing criticism triggered the external partners to distance themselves from the LAGeSo in an effort of trying to maintain their own legitimacy.

The “Tagesspiegel” quoted a manager from the welfare organization Caritas who now made the LAGeSo responsible for the failing coordination between NGOs and the authority:

“‘If the LAGeSo continues like that, we cannot rule out that people will die’, she warns. She explains that while all welfare organizations agreed on the immediate implementation of a coordination staff for medical care, LAGeSo delays the plan.” (TSP online, 14 October 2015, para. 1–2)

Trying to explain the chaotic situation at many private shelters, the shelter providers blamed the LAGeSo for miscommunication and wrong information about the new processes. The “Berliner Zeitung” reported:

“The LAGeSo claims that they informed the shelter providers about the new procedure to distribute cash directly at the shelters a week ago. ‘This is bullshit’, responds the provider and explains: ‘We haven’t received any information. [...] We even sent a catalogue of all our questions concerning the new procedure to the LAGeSo but never got an answer.’” (BZ online, 4 December 2015, para. 11)

Apart from external service providers, also volunteer initiatives such as “Moabit hilft” distanced themselves from the LAGeSo, thereby increasingly revealing information on the chaotic situation at the authority and making severe accusations. The “Sueddeutsche Zeitung” quoted members of the initiative:

“Whereas refugees are still waiting in the cold, the LAGeSo managers leave in time after work. [...] Meanwhile, we assume the LAGeSo is producing this chaos on purpose to deter refugees from coming to Berlin.” (SZ online, 21 October 2015, para. 4)

To underline their distance from LAGeSo, “Moabit hilft” and other private initiatives boycotted a celebration that was meant to honor all those supporting refugees in the Berlin townhall. The volunteers explained that they will not celebrate while refugees are suffering. The “Berliner Zeitung” quoted a speaker of the initiative:

“This invitation is absolutely inappropriate and tasteless!” (BLZ, 21 October 2015, para. 2)

Trying to protect their own reputation, childcare organizations working at the LAGeSo revealed what they perceived as the underlying causes of the chaos. The “Tagesspiegel” reported:

“Childcare organizations explain the fact that many children wait in the cold for hours by a logistical problem: The LAGeSo only receives the information of free shelter spots in the evening and avoids to provide busses during the day to have them ready for the night transports.” (TSP, 13 October 2015, p. 17)

Moreover, when the media reported about lacking qualifications of security guards supporting the LAGeSo, the “Security Industry Association” declined any responsibility. The “Berliner Zeitung” stated:

“The Security Industry Association criticizes the lack of training of many private securities [...]. The requirements for securing a construction site are very different from protecting a refugee shelter or a registration facility.” (BLZ, 28 October 2015, para. 3)

These quotes demonstrate that the call by the media that external stakeholders should take responsibility and support the authority, triggered a distancing of those partners from the

LAGeSo. These distancing efforts even revealed new information about the circumstances at the LAGeSo and shed light on unintended consequences of the alliances.

Media framing solution as problem: Cooperation and partnerships worsen situation. The distancing of external stakeholders and the revelations made about the circumstances at LAGeSo enabled the media to frame the alleged solution of external transformation as causing even worse problems for the authority. The media now started holding the LAGeSo accountable for its partners, accusing LAGeSo of a lack of oversight and control of its partners.

For example, volunteers who worked at the LAGeSo premises revealed that security guards frequently used violence against refugees. The “Sueddeutsche Zeitung” reported about a video a volunteer published showing serious attacks of security guards:

“The video takes only a few seconds but the images have a long after-effect. The video, which Berlin media distributed, shows how security guards beat up two refugees in front of the LAGeSo.” (SZ, 24 October 2015, para. 1)

Moreover, the “Tagesspiegel” reported about the fact that many of the security guards did not pass adequate background checks, for example regarding their criminal records:

“It became public that a member of the security company working at a refugee shelter is a convicted sex offender [...]. There is no official information why the man did not attract any attention. The provider of the shelter explained that there are only random check-ups.” (TSP, 4 July 2015, p. 16)

Articles also described how the cooperation with specialists such as external translators created new problems for the LAGeSo. Focusing on individual misbehavior, the newspaper “Berliner Kurier” as well as the “Tagesspiegel” reported about several cases of corruption of translators as well as volunteers at the LAGeSo:

“At least one translator and an employee of an external staff service took money from refugees for the waiting batches.” (TSP, 10 October 2015, p. 16)

“A terrible suspicion has been confirmed: Volunteers took money from refugees at the LAGeSo in exchange for giving them preferential treatment. Rumors about further cases persist.” (BK, 20 January 2016, para. 1)

Besides the focus on individual misbehavior, the media also addressed new problems resulting from partnerships with private shelter providers. Aiming at defending themselves, service

providers went to the press and revealed that the LAGeSo had not been paying them for months. The “Tagesspiegel” reported:

„If you think it can’t get any worse, you were wrong. Providers of shelters and hostels have been waiting for the transfer of the rates for months now. The LAGeSo fails in managing the cost examinations. [...] Now they have started to transfer average flat rates so the shelter providers don’t go bankrupt.” (TSP, 9 September 2015, p. 7)

Apart from revealing problems that resulted from the cooperation of LAGeSo with external partners the external stakeholders were reported to even impede measures taken by LAGeSo. The “Tagesspiegel” stated:

“More and more social workers recommend their proteges to stay at the shelters and not to go to the LAGeSo, even if they have an appointment.” (TSP, 13 October 2016, p. 17).

In light of all these allegations the media started questioning LAGeSo’s partnership management capability and created the perception of an apparent lack of control by the authority. The “Berliner Kurier” titled:

“LAGeSo Rip-Off [...]. It is not surprising that individuals were able to profit from the chaos at LAGeSo as there were no rules nor control.” (BK, 22 May 2016, para. 1, 5)

To summarize, these findings suggest that the media on the one hand were framing a lack of capacity and know-how as a key problem and suggested that LAGeSo should partner up with NGOs and external companies to address this shortcoming, whilst on the other hand, LAGeSo was later confronted with the mismanagement and misconduct of its partners. Addressing external stakeholders to take responsibility and calling on them to act, triggered them to justify themselves and to distance from the LAGeSo. These distancing efforts revealed emerging problems caused by cooperating with the LAGeSo and allowed the media to frame the suggested solution of partnering as even worsening the problems of LAGeSo.

Process Summary

Figure 2 is designed to summarize the process of failing legitimacy repair from our findings. As our data analysis has shown, the co-construction of the internal and external transformation paradox gives rise to the emerging tension between the initial object of legitimacy and the new object of legitimacy which eventually leads to a vicious circle of legitimacy repair. The cycle was triggered by the media framing the problems of LAGeSo, calling for an internal and external transformation, and asking LAGeSo’s stakeholders (internal and external) to take

responsibility. In case of the internal transformation paradox, LAGeSo's employees and leadership publicly refused to take over the responsibility for the chaotic situation. In denying responsibility, internal stakeholders were leaking new information to the press, thereby exposing even more weaknesses and problems of internal structures, leading to an increasing transparency of LAGeSo. In case of the external transformation paradox, the media called LAGeSo to partner with external stakeholders to address the chaotic situation. However, the external partners refused to take responsibility for the chaotic situation and publicly exposed further weaknesses. This contributed to an extension of responsibility: LAGeSo was no longer only held accountable for its own actions, but also for the shortcoming and failures of its partners, hence the responsibility of LAGeSo was increasing. These two processes, the increasing internal transparency of LAGeSo and the extension of its responsibility that now also included its external partners, lead to a change of the object of legitimacy that builds the new bases for the evaluation by the media. The increasing transparency and the extension of responsibility changed the initial object of LAGeSo. The media were not any longer evaluating the initial object of legitimacy and its alleged problems, but instead the evaluation was now based on the new insights and information gained through the increasing transparency and the extension of responsibility. The media evaluated this new object of legitimacy and framed it as the source of new problems that undermined the legitimacy of LAGeSo. Hence, LAGeSo found it impossible to repair its legitimacy in the eye of the media. As our analysis shows, the drivers of this vicious circle were the co-constructed paradoxes of internal and external transformation: The stakeholders' justification and need to distance themselves from LAGeSo against the accusations by the media enabled the media to observe even more and worse weaknesses and to also hold LAGeSo accountable for the actions of its partners. Hence, doing what the media actually asked for created new problems LAGeSo had to defend itself against. This tension between the initial and the new object of legitimacy contributed to the failure of the repair process and can explain, why LAGeSo did not succeed in repairing its legitimacy, despite actually doing what the media had called for.

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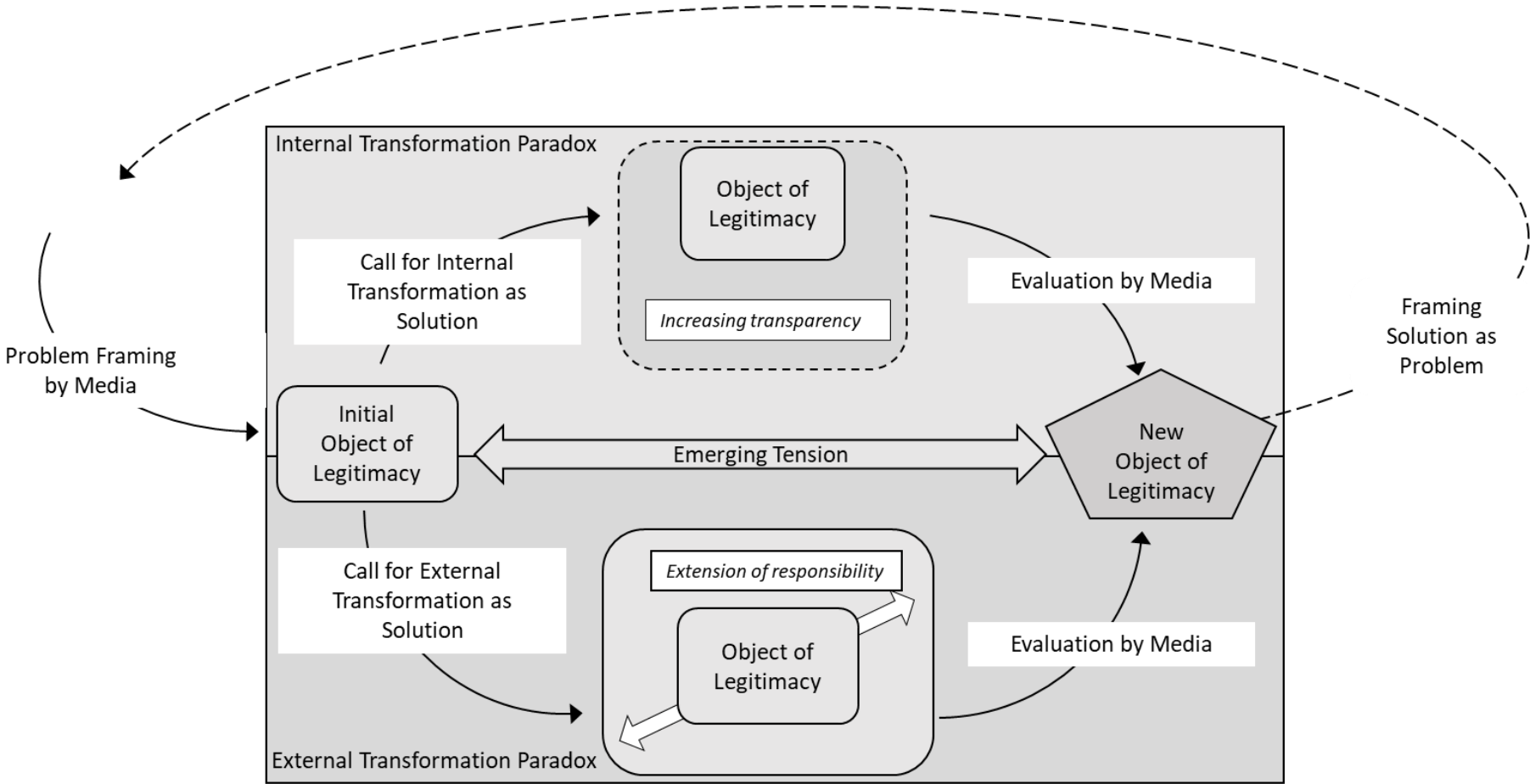


Figure 2: The vicious circle of failing legitimacy repair

DISCUSSION

Our analysis of the media discourse on the persistent legitimacy crisis of LAGeSo Berlin revealed the co-cocreation process of two paradoxical tensions: the internal transformation paradox, and the external transformation paradox. We thereby contribute to our understanding of legitimacy repair processes by highlighting the powerful role of the media as failing agents and the tensions resulting from the changing nature of the object of legitimacy. Second, our insights contribute to paradox theory by pointing to the important role of multiple actors in the co-creation of paradoxes and the respective consequences for paradox management.

The Media as a Failing Agent in Legitimacy Repair

Whereas the legitimacy literature acknowledges that the media play an important role in legitimacy discourses (Deephouse & Suchman, 2013), they are predominantly conceptualized as indicators of legitimacy levels (e.g. Lamertz & Baum, 2009; Pollock & Rindova, 2003) or as intermediaries between organization and the public (Deephouse & Suchman, 2013: 56). However, the current legitimacy discourse (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Suddaby et al., 2017) criticizes that understanding media as passive spectators or a mere audience of legitimacy processes significantly underestimates their role and neglects their influence especially at the macro level of legitimacy.

Our analysis extends this perspective of media as active players in the legitimacy repair process. As we show, the media are not just passive spectators or intermediaries of legitimacy claims, but instead have the power to first of all construct a legitimacy problem that undermines the legitimacy of an organization. As Johnson et al. (2006: 54) argue, “a social object is construed as legitimate” and depends on external attribution. But as our findings show, media not only constructed the legitimacy problem, but also framed the authority’s response to address the legitimacy problem as illegitimate. The power to challenge legitimacy (problem framing) and to simultaneously present the solution as illegitimate (framing solution as problem) renders media a “failing agent” and traps the organization into a paradoxical situation. Hence, the media framing the organization as failing becomes a self-legitimizing narrative (Geiger & Antonacopoulou, 2009). As agents of legitimacy attribution, the media have the power to call for a change of the legitimacy object, thereby fueling the constant becoming (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) of the legitimacy object. Such a processual understanding of legitimacy (Suddaby et al., 2017) helps to explain our findings: Since legitimacy is attributed by the media it does not refer to a stable object, but in calling for a change of the object, the basis for attribution inevitably

changes. The legitimacy object is hence in a constant, lingering state of change which renders the repair of legitimacy difficult. For legitimacy to be repaired and for the public to regain trust in the legitimacy object, it would need to be able to reach at least a provisional state of stability that would allow the attribution of legitimacy (Eberl et al., 2015). By simultaneously framing problems and evaluating solutions the media are able to keep the legitimacy object in a constant state of an instable, precarious flux, preventing it from reaching any stabilization.

The Role of Multiple Actors in the Co-Creation of Paradoxes

Our analysis shows how the media, together with internal and external stakeholders, co-constructed the internal and external transformation paradox. The co-construction of these paradoxes explains how the attempt to repair legitimacy caused a vicious circle the organization was unable to escape from. Commonly, paradox theory explains the emergence of such vicious circles with the inadequate response of managers to salient paradoxes (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Smith and Lewis (2011: 391) argue that once a paradox is rendered salient “paradoxical tensions spur responses”. Active responses by managers such as the accepting and embracing of paradoxes are found to produce positive outcomes (e.g. Calabretta et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2020; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018), defensive managerial approaches such as denial, emotional anxiety, or inertia are assumed to result in vicious circles (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

However, our findings depart from these insights by highlighting the co-creation process of paradoxical tensions that involves a powerful external actor (media) as well as internal and external stakeholders of the organization. Whereas paradox theory has mainly focused on paradoxes emerging within an organization (e.g., Cuganesan, 2016; Es-Sajjade et al., 2021; Jay, 2013; Papachroni et al., 2014) our study shows that organizations might be confronted with paradoxical tensions that are co-constructed by multiple actors. We show that if organizations are confronted with co-created paradoxes one party alone might not be able to address the paradox successfully and that response options are very limited in such cases.

This has the potential to extend insight into the role of powerful actors in responses to paradoxes (Berti & Simpson 2021). Whereas Berti and Simpson (2021) make the important point that actors in organizations sometimes lack the power to pursue adequate response strategies to paradoxical tensions, our study shows that paradoxes might be co-created by multiple actors. In case of such a co-construction, the paradoxical tension cannot be successfully addressed by the focal organization. It is hence not a question of the power or the cognitive ability of top managers if paradoxical tensions can be addressed fruitfully. As our findings show, LAGeSo

as the organization, however, lacked any capacity to appropriately respond to the paradox since it was not within their own disposition to deal with it. Such processes of co-creation may hence construct paradoxical situations wherein organizations are trapped “between non-existent alternatives” (Putnam et al., 2016: 83).

Seen this way, our study shows that how to respond to paradoxes (active or passive) is not always in the discretion of capable managers as current paradox theory assumes, but instead multiple actors from within as well outside the organization may co-construct paradoxes that cannot be addressed by the management of the focal organization alone. Hence, current paradox management approaches need to extend the perspective and consider that oftentimes paradoxical tensions are not inherent properties of organizations, but instead are co-constructed which requires different, novel response strategies. As our study reveals, the idea that paradoxical tensions can be successfully addressed by mindful, capable managers neglects that organizations may be trapped into tensions that are co-created. Shifting our attention to the role and power of external actors in the process of (co-)creating paradoxes is important since it allows us to explain why paradox management might fail even despite the best intentions of the responsible managers. This finding is supported by recent approaches that treat paradoxes not as “things” that can be controlled by managers (Cunha & Putnam, 2017: 100), but highlight the processual nature of paradox emergence and manifestation. Weiser and Laamanen (2022) introduce the dissipative equilibrium model to capture the temporary nature of equilibrium states and highlight the processual view of paradoxes, thereby assuming that paradox management constitutes a complex and ongoing task of an organization. Our study contributes to these insights by showing how paradoxes emerge and persist in a process of co-construction which is vital for understanding how paradoxes can be addressed and managed.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

From a theoretical point of view, the paper highlights implications for legitimacy and paradox research as well as the fruitful connection of both streams of literature. First, the findings suggest that legitimacy repair contains a high risk of failure. Whereas the current literature mainly assumes successful outcomes of repair strategies, future research needs to focus on cases of persistent legitimacy loss and failing repair attempts. Second, the paper contributes to the legitimacy-as-process perspective (Suddaby et al., 2017). Whereas the perspective analyzes legitimacy “in terms of movement, activity, events, change and temporal evolution” (Langley, 2007: 271), it still describes the entity of legitimacy as stable. However, our findings show the

constant changes of the object of legitimacy along different dimensions thereby making it impossible to reach a stable and constant legitimacy attribution. Regarding paradox research, our findings first of all stress the impact of powerful actors outside the organization. Our case shows that the emergence of a vicious circle is not attributed to a defensive paradox approach but is caused by an external actor that imposes the paradox on the organization. Moreover, highlighting the emergence of co-created paradoxes, future research needs to focus more explicitly on the role of multiple actors in co-creation processes and the consequences for paradox management if addressing a paradox is beyond the capability of a single organization.

From a practitioners' perspective, our paper hence highlights that the approach of paradox embracing does not always present a possible strategy to follow. In the case of LAGeSo, it is the organization's active "catching of the ball" that enables the co-construction of a paradox which suggests that rejecting to catch the ball and hence "responding outside the paradox" may present a better strategy for the organization.

LIMITATIONS

Of course, this work has limitations. First, our study of LAGeSo is certainly an extreme case of failing legitimacy repair on the one hand, and as a public authority LAGeSo on the other hand may not ultimately die. However, extreme cases such as LAGeSo "often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied" (Flyvbjerg, 2016: 229). Moreover, our findings do not intend to generalize the process of problem framing by the media and do not imply that repairing legitimacy is always "doomed to fail". Instead, it depends on the question how the media actually frame the problem and to whom they attribute the blame.

A second limitation may result from the data source, since the analysis relies exclusively on newspaper articles. There might be cases in which the media attributions differ from news outlet to news outlet, depending on their political orientation and agenda. In such cases it is less likely that a vicious circle of failing legitimacy can be observed as it has been in our case. In those cases, the organization might decide to listen to one source of legitimacy only and ignore other voices. The same might hold true if we also take social media into account which usually present a broader, sometimes even more extreme spectrum of opinions. This might hence reveal a more diverse picture and the legitimacy loss might be attributed and persist only within a specific group.

A third limitation presents the fact that our study does not analyze the underlying intentions of the media and politicians involved in the discourse on the larger ‘refugee crisis’. However, our aim was to better understand the phenomenon of failing legitimacy repair and not the political background of the crisis.

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**Article IV: Nobody Said It Was Easy – System Level Dynamics in
the Emergence and Navigation of Multi-Actor Paradoxes**

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we bridge the gap between paradox theory and a system level perspective to study how system level dynamics initiate and drive multi-actor paradoxes in the response to the grand challenge of climate-induced disasters. We show how multiple actors engage in contradictory yet interrelated practices that fuel paradoxical dynamics and eventually create a non-optimal but stable equilibrium that inhibits system change. We explore this process through a longitudinal ethnography study on the implementation of the “Forecast-based Financing” approach in Uganda, an approach that shall initiate early action in anticipation of disasters. Our findings reveal how the nexus of stakeholders’ implementation practices drives paradoxical dynamics that constitute self-reinforcing cycles. Drawing on these insights, we develop a process model that explains how paradoxical dynamics not only hinder the tackling of the grand challenge but stabilize each other, contributing to a path-dependent development. We contribute to theory in at least two ways: First, we theorize how addressing grand challenges spurs an interplay of paradoxical dynamics, creating non-optimal but stable, path-dependent equilibria on the system level, which are difficult to tackle. Second, we introduce a dynamic perspective on paradoxes, thereby moving beyond the perspective of stable paradox poles that can be embraced.

Keywords: Grand challenge, multi-actor paradox, system dynamics, path dependence, wicked problems, anticipatory action, collective action

INTRODUCTION

“Today, one-third of the world’s people mainly in least developed countries and small island developing states are still not covered by early warning systems. In Africa, it is even worse: 60 percent of people lack coverage. This is unacceptable, particularly with climate impacts sure to get even worse. Early warnings and action save lives. To that end, today I announce the United Nations will spearhead new action to ensure every person on Earth is protected by early warning systems within five years.” (UN Secretary-General’s message on World Meteorological Day, 23 March 2022)

Anticipating climate-induced disasters through early warning systems and acting before the actual impact presents a novel paradigm in disaster response (IFRC, 2020) and has created political momentum for a potential system change (German Federal Foreign Office, 2022). While it is expected that the impacts of climate change will drastically increase over the upcoming decades, its latent effects, such as food insecurity and violent conflicts, are already leading to the displacement of millions of people every year, further intensifying humanitarian crises across the world (Schneider et al., 2021). These immediate as well as medium- and long-term effects of climate-induced disasters qualify as “grand challenges”, large-scale problems with far-reaching societal implications characterized by being uncertain, complex, and evaluative (Ferraro et al., 2015). Whereas grand challenges are conceptualized as critical barriers that need to be removed to generate positive change (George et al., 2016), research points out that addressing them confronts actors with inseparable and co-occurring tensions, frequently creating the perception of “wicked problems” (Reinecke & Ansari, 2016). Such tensions range from competing social-market demands (Iivonen, 2017; Sharma & Bansal, 2017), competition versus cooperation (Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018; Jarzabkowski & Bednarek, 2017), local versus global (Schrage & Rasche, 2021; Tracey & Creed, 2017) to conflicting temporal orientations (Slawinski & Bansal, 2015; Slawinski et al., 2017).

In recent years, paradox theory has started to shed light on the question how organizations and their members cope with such tensions, i.e., with elements that are contradictory yet interrelated and persistent (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 382). The paradox literature predominantly argues that paradoxes need to be actively embraced to create long-term sustainability and equilibrium, which means both to differentiate between and to integrate conflicting poles (Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). The paradox literature also finds that defensive approaches to paradoxes, such as prioritizing one pole over the other, lead to vicious circles and produce wrecking ball effects – “an overly powerful swing in the opposing direction creates a new and even greater

challenge” (Smith & Lewis, 2022, p. 57). Whereas paradox theory thus provides guidance on how organizations and managers should approach and handle paradoxes, grand challenges involve inseparable and co-occurring tensions that reach beyond single organizations or even countries (Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016). Paradoxical tensions that persist at the system level and typically characterize grand challenges (Cunha & Putnam, 2017; Schad & Bansal, 2018) constitute multi-actor problems and hence go beyond the perspective of isolated paradoxes playing out inside single organizations (Jarzabkowski et al., 2022). When acknowledging the influence of the interactions of multiple actors at the system level, it is crucial to consider system dynamics and its role in addressing paradoxical tensions. Hence, in order to understand how grand challenges can be addressed, we need to better understand how paradoxes emerge and interact on the system level. In this paper, we therefore address the research question of *how system level dynamics initiate and drive multi-actor paradoxes and how these dynamics influence paradox navigation*.

We explore the role of system level dynamics in the emergence of paradoxes in the context of the implementation of the so-called ‘Forecast-based Financing’ approach (FbF). FbF is a funding mechanism that aims at providing humanitarian aid organizations with financial and institutional capabilities to act in anticipation of disasters (here floods and droughts). The FbF mechanism was initiated by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and rolled out at the level of the National Societies like the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS). Whereas the URCS has the implementation mandate for FbF, the success of the approach depends on the engagement of key stakeholders including the IFRC, local governments, local URCS branches as well as the disaster-affected communities. Taking a practice lens, we conducted an ethnographic field study following the FbF implementation alongside the involvement of key actors over a time period of more than three years. We found that the key stakeholders engage in different practices that fuel contradictory yet interrelated system dynamics. At the system level, these dynamics drive two main paradoxical dynamics, which we labeled “knowing more and doing less” and “doing more and knowing less”. First, we show how these dynamics emerge and how they create self-reinforcing dynamics. Second, we explain how these two dynamics interact and stabilize each other, hence creating a non-optimal path-dependent equilibrium. We thereby contribute to research on grand challenges by exploring why change at the system level is challenging. We further contribute to paradox theory by introducing a dynamic perspective and we conceptualize paradoxes as contradictory yet interrelated dynamics that emerge at the system level and cannot be addressed by a single organization.

The paper is structured as follows: First, we summarize the theoretical background on grand challenges and the management of multi-actor paradoxes. Second, we introduce the empirical case and explain our data collection and analysis. Third, we present our findings by zooming in to describe how practices drive self-reinforcing system dynamics and then zooming out to explore the contradictory yet interrelated interplay of these dynamics on a system level. We summarize our findings in a process model, which reveals how paradoxical dynamics emerge on a system level and how they actually contribute to a path-dependent stabilization of the dynamics, which makes them difficult to address. This facilitates a better understanding of how grand challenges sustain and why they cannot be successfully addressed by single organizations. Fourth, we present the paper's contributions to research on grand challenges and paradox theory. We conclude with limitations and future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Grand Challenges and Multi-Actor Paradoxes

George et al. (2016, p. 1881) define grand challenges as formulations of global problems that “by their very nature, require coordinated and sustained effort from multiple and diverse stakeholders toward a clearly articulated problem or goal”. Besides the characteristic of constituting multi-actor problems, grand challenges show the analytical dimensions of complexity, uncertainty, and evaluativeness (Ferraro et al., 2015). First, grand challenges are complex in the sense that they include a magnitude of interactions, associations, and nonlinear dynamics; second, they are uncertain since the problems themselves as well as their evolution are very difficult to forecast; and third, they are evaluative as they go beyond jurisdictional boundaries, implicate contrasting criteria of worth, and can raise new problems and concerns during the process of being addressed (Ferraro et al., 2015, p. 365). These elements of grand challenges provide an ideal nurturing ground for contradictory yet interrelated tensions, which can be conceptualized with a paradox lens (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Whereas, for years, contingency theory has offered approaches to tensions building on the idea that organizations need to decide between conflicting poles by aligning with their external environment (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967), paradox theory recommends a ‘both/and’ logic, which builds on embracing opposing elements simultaneously (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The paradox lens has been used to reassess well-known fields of tensions, such as exploration and exploitation (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Smith & Tushman, 2005), competition and

cooperation (Keller et al., 2017; Stadtler & van Wassenhove, 2016), or social and financial mission (Iivonen, 2017; Sharma & Bansal, 2017).

Considering the increasing complexity and interrelations of the tensions that organizations face, the paradox literature has recently shifted attention to the concepts of knotted and nested paradoxes (Gaim et al., 2021; Sheep et al., 2016). Paradox knots are defined as multiple co-occurring tensions that are inseparably entangled but interdependent and can be amplifying or attenuating in their effects on each other (Sheep et al., 2016, p. 463). Nested paradoxes present tensions that reverberate across organizational levels and are hence particularly difficult to address (Gaim et al., 2021). Despite the growing interest in co-occurring tensions and nested paradoxes (Bednarek et al., 2021; Jarzabkowski et al., 2022), paradox research predominantly focuses on how distinct paradoxes play out inside a specific organization (Calabretta et al., 2017; Cuganesan, 2016; Jay, 2013; Smith, 2014). While individual efforts in dealing with paradoxes are important, focusing predominately on the management of tensions from the perspective of single organizations has severe limitations. Grand challenges and wicked problems constitute “large scale social challenges caught in causal webs of interlinking variables spanning national boundaries” (Reinecke & Ansari, 2016, p. 299) and are connected across multiple levels (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Such contradicting yet interrelated tensions that constitute the very nature of grand challenges hence go beyond the management of single organizations or the influence of individual managers.

Paradox scholars recognize that paradoxical tensions frequently emerge between organizations and have only recently started to shift their attention towards intra-organizational paradoxes (Henry et al., 2022; Jarzabkowski et al., 2019; Sharma & Bansal, 2017; Stadtler & van Wassenhove, 2016). Nonetheless, the majority of studies focus on tensions stemming from conflicting organizational logics, such as between private, public, and non-profit sector organizations. For instance, Sharma and Bansal (2017) explore the social-market paradox within the cooperation of a private company and an NGO and find that the success of the cooperation depends on the organizations’ understanding of the nature of the paradox allowing for or impeding a ‘both/and’ approach. Stadtler and van Wassenhove (2016) concentrate on the paradox of cooptation within a multi-company, cross-sector partnership and show how employees successfully manage tensions by engaging in paradoxical frames. Shedding light on the paradox of stakeholder inclusiveness and administrative efficiency within cross-sector partnerships, Henry et al. (2022) stress the role of boundary work in paradox management and show how the paradox changed and reemerged in different phases of the partnership. These

findings indubitably extend our insights into the emergence of intra-organizational paradoxes, however, they only concentrate on the management of tensions at the individual level (Stadtler & van Wassenhove, 2016) or on the organizational level by focusing on organizational practices and underlying perspectives within the organizations (Henry et al., 2022; Sharma & Bansal, 2017). Also, focusing on partnerships and cross-sector alliances builds on rather defined dyads and clear boundaries, which do not necessarily represent wider interorganizational systems (Jarzabkowski et al., 2022).

To our knowledge, the study by Jarzabkowski et al. (2022) is so far the only one to explicitly study the emergence and dynamics of paradoxes on the interorganizational level. In their study of multi-country risk pools, the authors show how diverse organizational actors connect and balance the tensions of knotted paradoxes. By knotting and reknitting the poles of the paradoxes, actors engaged in an iterative cycle between equilibrium and disequilibrium, which was critical for handling the paradoxes productively. This case demonstrates how actors' practices and interactions allow them to navigate contradictions within interorganizational systems. However, despite these first insights, research on grand challenges and paradox management still lacks an understanding of how paradoxical tensions at the system level emerge and which dynamics shape and stabilize multi-actor paradoxes. This is, as we argue, critical in order to better understand why tackling and successfully addressing grand challenges remains such a difficult endeavor and, despite considerable efforts and multi-stakeholder commitment, continues to fail (Couture et al., 2022). Schad and Bansal (2018, p. 1493) summarize that while paradox scholars focus on managerial approaches to tackle wicked problems, "the focus on the perceived tensions overlooks the complex systems that cause the tensions".

Stressing the distinctive nature of multi-actor paradoxes in the context of tackling grand challenges and highlighting the limitations of single organizations' efforts in this regard, we shift our focus to the system level. Consequently, we aim at answering the following research question: *How do system level dynamics initiate and drive multi-actor paradoxes and how do these dynamics influence paradox navigation?*

METHODS

Research Setting and Case Description

Our research question calls for a qualitative approach of data collection and analysis (Gioia et al., 2012). Inductive qualitative research is particularly appropriate when the research question focuses on developing theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), especially with regard to processes (Langley, 1999). To collect the data, we take an explorative approach with a focus on non-participatory observation. As we are interested in understanding how system level dynamics initiate and drive multi-actor paradoxes in addressing grand challenges, we purposefully sampled (Patton, 2015) the implementation of FbF by the URCS in Uganda as our case study.

Uganda is at severe risk to climate-induced disasters and frequently experiences extreme weather events that cause emergencies, such as floods, droughts, and landslides. The occurrence of natural disasters in Uganda has increased dramatically over the last thirty years, affecting around 200,000 Ugandans each year (The World Bank Group, 2020). Uganda's vulnerability is aggravated due to high levels of poverty and the country's dependence on 'climate sensitive' sectors, such as tourism, agriculture, forestry, and fishery. In addition, non-climate stressors, such as lacking and inadequate infrastructure and population growth (The World Bank Group, 2022), have significant impact on climate change vulnerability. As the leading humanitarian aid organization in Uganda, the URCS plays a key role in disaster management including disaster risk reduction, community capacity building as well as emergency preparedness and response. As one of the first National Societies within the network of the IFRC, the URCS implemented the 'Forecast-based Financing' approach (Jjemba et al., 2018). FbF represents an innovative approach to humanitarian aid, which challenges traditional disaster response mechanisms. Instead of waiting for a disaster to strike to then provide support to mitigate human suffering, FbF builds on a system of early warning triggering early action. The approach aims at combatting the various challenges of traditional disaster response, such as the lack of planning and financing for early action, and the related inability to mitigate the impact of disasters (Rüth et al., 2017). FbF is based on the idea that extreme weather-related events, such as floods and droughts, are predictable by reliable weather forecasting, and thus early preparedness actions allow to reduce or sometimes even to avoid the impacts. FbF hence aims at acting during the gap between knowing that a disaster will occur and the point it actually occurs, creating a window of opportunity between the anticipation and actualization of a

disaster. By establishing specific triggers to predict disasters, it allows organizations to engage in preparedness measures and other forms of early action (Hagen et al., 2020).

Despite the institutional anchoring within the IFRC and the implementation mandate of the URCS, FbF and the approach's effectiveness strongly depend on the interaction and collaboration with key stakeholders. FbF aims at initiating a system-wide change in humanitarian aid, which involves local governments, the disaster-affected communities as well as the URCS national branch structures. Considering the role and influence of multiple actors on the FbF implementation process, the success of the approach to mitigate climate-induced disasters and to trigger a substantial paradigm shift towards anticipatory action constitutes a challenging endeavor at the system level.

Data Collection

To understand the dynamics that contribute to the emergence of multi-actor paradoxes at the system level, we followed an explorative, ethnographic approach (van Maanen, 2011). Paying particular attention to the multi-faceted phenomenon of paradoxical tensions that emerge from the interactions of multiple actors at the system level, we engaged in the approach of team-based ethnography that allows for deep insights into interrelated practices and processes (Jarzabkowski et al., 2015). Our study builds on the implementation process of FbF and the involvement and interactions of key stakeholders during the time period of November 2019 to December 2022. As the unit of analysis, we focused on the implementation practices of key stakeholders as well as on emerging tensions at the system level. The data collection comprises non-participatory observations, formal and informal interviews, and focus group discussions with key stakeholders. In addition, we attended numerous meetings and analyzed documents on FbF and its implementation. We, i.e., three researchers, went on two four-week field trips to Uganda in September 2021 and March 2022. We also participated in workshops and conferences on FbF preceding, in-between, and following the field trips. To actually understand the complex dynamics at the system level, we took a system perspective and followed the FbF implementation process alongside the involvement of the IFRC, the URCS headquarter, the local URCS branches, district governments as well as the affected communities. This resulted in a total of 1357 hours of direct observation, 1280 pages of field notes and 139 interviews with key stakeholders. Table 1 presents an overview of the collected data.

Non-participatory Observation			
Time spent in the field (3 researchers)	192		<i>days</i>
Time spent in the field (3 researchers)	1.357:30		<i>hours</i>
Field notes (total)	1.280		<i>pages</i>
Documents	950		<i>pages</i>
Interviews			
<i>Stakeholder</i>	<i>No. of interviews</i>	<i>No. of participants</i>	<i>Duration (hours)</i>
IFRC	4	8	05:00
URCS	20	24	23:20
URCS branches	15	20	15:00
District government	8	12	08:10
Communities (including focus group discussions)	92	412	88:10
Total	139	476	139:40
Meetings & Workshops			
<i>Stakeholder</i>	<i>No. of meetings/workshops</i>	<i>No. of participants</i>	<i>Duration (hours)</i>
IFRC	6	44	18:30
URCS	9	24	10:30
URCS branches	12	84	08:30
Total	27	152	37:30
Focus Group Discussions			
<i>Location</i>	<i>No. of focus groups</i>	<i>No. of participants</i>	
Moroto	16	56	
Nakasangola	10	28	
Butaleja	11	78	
Amuria	13	119	
Obongi	12	100	
<i>Total flood</i>	36	297	
<i>Total drought</i>	26	84	
Total	62	381	

Table 1: Overview of data collection

Data Analysis

Guided by our interest in the emergence of system level dynamics and their influence on paradox navigation, our interpretive analysis unfolded over four steps, which involved switching between inductive and abductive coding of the data. Due to our interest in larger phenomena, which are rooted in specific practices, our data analysis required zooming in and zooming out (Nicolini, 2009) in distinct rounds of coding.

Each analysis served as input for the subsequent one, allowing us to systematically unpack phenomena on a system level. First, following an inductive, grounded approach (Corbin &

Strauss, 1990; Eisenhardt et al., 2016), our data collection and analysis represented an alternating process that started with studying documents and participating in online meetings with the URCS, learning about the first implementation steps of FbF at the end of 2019, continued throughout two field trips in September 2021 and March 2022, and ended with a project meeting and the participation of an international conference on anticipatory action in Germany in December 2022. During this first step, the research team continuously discussed the collected data, held reflective sessions at the end of each day in the field in an effort to make sense out of the large amount of data. From these discussions, first, rough contours of themes (Harrison & Rouse, 2014) emerged, which pointed us to the existence of self-reinforcing dynamics that seemed to be key in explaining what we had actually observed. Given our interest in system level dynamics, this pointed us to an important finding, which we subsequently analyzed more systematically. In a second step, we wrote down rich narratives about the FbF implementation journey and the practices the key actors engaged in, based on our field notes, interview and meeting transcripts as well as numerous FbF documents (Langley, 1999). Thoroughly discussing these rich accounts, we zoomed in to our data (Nicolini, 2009) to systematically distill distinct practices within the FbF implementation process. To identify practices in our data set, we used inductive coding (Gioia et al., 2012) to understand who (responsible key actors) did what (which activities where performed) and to what purpose during the implementation process. As part of this analysis, first order codes were clustered into second order dimensions based on similarities and differences, which allowed us to identify key practices carried out by distinct key actors. These identified practices formed the starting point and input for a further data analysis. In a third step, with regard to our interest in system level dynamics and hence larger phenomena, we followed the suggestion by Kremser and Sydow (2022, p. 12) to focus our analysis on the linkages between, or nexus of, practices. They make the important point that system level dynamics will most likely not only affect one isolated practice but rather encompass larger phenomena, i.e., a complex of practice. Following their line of thought, the locus of dynamics can best be described as a nexus of practices, i.e., “a set of performative linkages that connect multiple practices in such a way that they enable and constrain each other” (Kremser & Sydow, 2022, p. 12). Hence, in this step of our analysis, we were interested in uncovering the linkages between the identified practices and how they enabled and constrained each other. Therefore, we coded for the performative linkages between the identified practices, which enabled us to uncover specific unfolding dynamics. To do so, we analyzed how practices influenced each other; we started with a process of first order coding of specific ‘performative linkages’ and clustered these linkages according to similarities and

differences to identify specific dynamics. In a fourth and final step of our data analysis and due to our interest in the dynamics of multi-actor paradoxes, we again used the outcome of the third coding step as an input (the identified dynamics) and aimed at uncovering the relationship between these dynamics. Informed by paradox theory and the definition of paradoxes as contradictory yet interrelated tensions (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 382), we engaged in a process of abductive coding. In line with abductive coding (Locke et al., 2008; van Maanen et al., 2007), we used contradiction, interrelation, and persistence as the coding structure and aimed at identifying the practices in our data that described the interplay between the dynamics. We primarily relied on interview data in which our respondents reflected about FbF and the way it was implemented. This enabled us to distill two paradoxical dynamics that unfolded at the system level.

FINDINGS

Our findings are presented in two parts. In the first part, we present the paradox of “knowing more and doing less”. This paradoxical dynamic is driven by a nexus of practices that aim at the operationalization and specification of FbF. In the second part, we show how the paradox of “doing more and knowing less” is fueled by a nexus of practices of institutionalization and defensive practices. Subsequent to the data analysis, we structure the findings sections by first zooming in to explain each of the related practices and how the nexus of those practices constitutes distinct dynamics. Second, we zoom out to the system level and show how the identified dynamics give rise to contradictory yet interrelated tensions, which constitute a paradox that is difficult to address because of its self-reinforcing nature. We finally develop a process summary, which shows how the paradoxical system dynamics interact and stabilize each other, creating a stable, path-dependent equilibrium.

Part 1: Paradoxical Dynamic of Knowing More and Doing Less

To explain the paradox of “knowing more and doing less”, we first zoom in to show how practices that were enacted with the intention to operationalize the new FbF approach give rise to what we have labeled “operationalization and specification dynamics”, which unfold at the nexus between the practices. In a second step, we zoom out to the system level to analyze the emerging dynamics and their contradictory yet interrelated and persistent relationship.

Zooming in: Operationalization dynamics

The analysis of the data revealed two practices that have the purpose of operationalizing FbF: *roadmapping* and *datafication*. The nexus of these practices gives rise to what we have labeled *operationalization dynamics*.

Roadmapping by IFRC. The IFRC plays a key role when it comes to the operationalization of FbF. As the umbrella organization for all National Red Cross Societies and the interface to international donors, the IFRC determines the general design and structure of FbF, practicing what we have labeled “roadmapping”. Pursuing the objective of standardization and localization, the IFRC engaged in activities guiding the URCS in the implementation process. As an initial step, the IFRC recommended to conduct a feasibility study “to assess to what extent the contexts in Uganda and the capacities of URCS [...] are conducive for the implementation of FbF” (Uganda Feasibility Study Report, 2018, p. 6). After the URCS had passed this hurdle, the IFRC formulated the requirement of an “Early Action Protocol” (EAP), which serves as an action guideline assigning roles and responsibilities for quick action once the trigger is activated. The protocol differs regarding the type of disaster (e.g., EAP for flood, EAP for drought) and includes the two key components of FbF: a trigger, i.e., “specific threshold values based on weather and climate forecasts [...] which are defined for each region” and early actions, i.e., “predefined measures [that] aim to minimize the impacts of extreme weather events and save human lives” (FbF Practitioners Manual, 2021, p. 4-5). Providing the EAP template and determining the essential building blocks of FbF formed a roadmap for the URCS to follow and secured standardization across National Societies. At the same time, the IFRC pursued the purpose of localization within the FbF operationalization. An IFRC FbF Advisor explained this purpose at an international conference for anticipatory action:

“Of course, we [IFRC] need guiding principles for FbF which the National Societies can build on [...], but we must also not forget about taking a locally-led lens. Triggers and vulnerabilities differ tremendously from region to region, for example a certain [early action] activity may be useful in Malawi but not in Honduras [...]”. (10th Global Dialogue Platform on Anticipatory Humanitarian Action, Berlin, 2022)

This statement demonstrates the IFRC’s understanding that the success of FbF depended on developing localized triggers and early actions that were adequate for each region. Roadmapping hence not only aimed at guaranteeing a certain degree of standardization by providing the URCS with an EAP template but also focused on localization by sensitizing for different vulnerabilities and exposure levels that the URCS needed to consider when implementing FbF.

Datafication by URCS. Following the roadmap designed by the IFRC to get “FbF-ready”, the URCS engaged in a practice that we labeled “datafication”. Aiming for the highest degree of accuracy within the EAPs, the URCS needed to approach the local communities to collect data to fill the protocols with information on specific triggers and early actions. Ensuring to gather highly precise and robust empirical data to later feed the EAPs, the URCS developed a wide range of data collection tools. These tools included questionnaires, app applications, quantitative scales, seasonal calendars as well as concepts for focus group discussions in the communities. The lengthy debates about the design of the research tools reached a level that even caused irritation within the organization. Stepping by the office of the FbF team, which was full of research materials and historical maps, a URCS top-level manager wondered: “Is this still URCS or are we now at the university?”

After finalizing the research tools, the URCS began to collect data across Uganda visiting the communities that were exposed to floods and droughts. Traveling with the FbF team and observing the data collection process over several weeks made us realize how much attention the URCS paid to regional specifics, vulnerabilities, demographics, and local knowledge. They did everything to ensure that the most detailed data was collected within the communities. When we arrived in the region of Karamoja in the north of Uganda, the leading URCS manager told us:

“People in Karamoja [drought region] are very different from other areas, the people here live as pastoralists, they have a different seasonality, different crops, different livelihood, a different history, [...] we need to be aware and consider this for the EAP. The volunteers should not come up with generic answers. We want them to have rich discussions with the communities and to prompt the details [...].”

Following these instructions, the local URCS volunteers, who were responsible to interview community members, collected meticulous descriptions about potential triggers and early actions. The interview notes included information about social structures in villages, gender specific activities, historic events, ceremonies as well as detailed accounts on farming habits and crops. The level of detail became obvious when observing an interview with an old man in the flood-region Butaleja. Asked about which early warning signals he observes as a sign of a flood, he answered:

“We know that a flood is coming when the stars are more separate from each other, we say ‘the stars are spaced’ [...] and also the winds change direction from this side to this

side [drawing arrows on the ground], and we also observe the crested cranes, they leave the rivers when a flood comes.”

This example shows how the practice of datafication aimed at collecting the most accurate and localized data to fill the components of the EAPs by producing rich accounts of potential triggers and early actions.

Zooming in: Specification dynamics

Next to practices aiming at operationalizing FbF, we identified practices that followed the purpose of specifying FbF: *defining expectations* and *selecting*. At the system level, the nexus of these practices constitutes what we labeled *specification dynamics*.

Defining expectations by communities. Being confronted with the detailed questioning of the URCS, the communities engaged in a practice we labeled “defining expectations”, which had the purpose to express and specify particular needs. The majority of the rural communities in Uganda is used to floods and/or dry spells during the year and perceives most of these disasters as part of their everyday life. An elderly woman in the flood-prone district of Katakwi told us: “Floods come and go, it’s like the seasons [...]” While most community members experienced flooding and drought as negative but somehow “given”, only the interference by the URCS triggered a deeper reflection on the idea of preventing disasters and the concept of strategic anticipation. Questioned by the volunteers about the impact of the disasters, the particular damage and specific vulnerabilities made communities identify and express gaps and needs. For instance, in a flood-prone village in the east, several men from the village escorted us to a local bridge. When asked about existing preparedness measures, the URCS volunteer translated:

“This man says, if they experience heavy rainfalls and expect the river to burst, they try to prepare drainages and embankments to stop the water from coming to the hats. But this is very difficult, they build it with the hands, it is very exhausting, especially for the elderly and women [...]. He says they need shovels and sandbags.” Eager to provide a further suggestion, another man approached the volunteer and added in English “Yes, shovels are good, but it’s better to have machinery, heavy machinery to stabilize the riverbanks.”

This scene demonstrates how the communities’ expectations towards the URCS and the potential of FbF were not only created in the first place but especially how these expectations materialized into particular wishes that did not exist before. After a long day of collecting data

and the consolidating of all the responses during the team dinner, a URCS manager stated: “What they [the communities] do is making a wish list.”

Selecting by URCS. After returning from the field trips with large amounts of data and concrete expectations for actions at the community level, the URCS engaged in a practice that we labeled “selecting”. The selecting practice aimed at reducing complexity in order to meet the criteria of the IFRC’s FbF roadmap. Bearing in mind the template of the EAP, the URCS needed to decide on triggers and specific early actions, which would be performed in case of a trigger activation. Selecting these key components from the rich pool of data proved to be a complex and lengthy endeavor. In an interview, a FbF manager described how he experienced the selection process:

“We had several internal meetings. We tried to narrow down the early actions by prioritizing and matching. First, we prioritized possible impacts, such as loss of lives, then we put all actions in relation to the most important impacts asking which actions could mitigate which impact. We then considered the costs [...], there were discussions like ‘If we select this early action for the EAP, it will be so expensive that we can’t do anything else’.”

This quote demonstrates the URCS’ tightrope walk of selecting early actions that were expected to be efficient, feasible for the communities, and at the same time not too costly. However, after the arduous work that went into the first draft of the EAP, it had to undergo a revision by the IFRC’s “Early Action Protocol Validation Committee”. The committee examined the draft and returned it to the URCS with a detailed feedback form stating which requirements were met, only partially met, or had not been met so far. For instance, from the committee’s viewpoint, the URCS had placed the trigger level too low, which resulted in too many disasters potentially covered by FbF and hence exceeded available funds. After more than one year and several rounds of revision, the EAP was finally approved, including the following trigger that the URCS re-selected during the revision:

“URCS will activate this EAP when GloFAS [Global Flood Awareness System] issues a forecast of at least 70% probability of a 5-year return period flood occurring in high priority flood prone districts [...] which will be anticipated to affect more than 1,000hh [households]. The EAP will be triggered with a lead time of 5 days [...]” (Early Action Protocol summary. Uganda: Floods, 2021, p. 2)

Linking the threshold for FbF activation to a “5-year return period flood” means that, on average, the trigger is activated once in five years. Considering a flood of such historic intensity, it becomes evident that only a very limited range of early actions is feasible. In contrast to the

detailed and manifold options for early actions derived from the data collections in the communities, the final EAP lists the “provisioning of shelter”, “cash transfers to facilitate evacuation”, “the distribution of water purification tablets”, and “community mapping”, i.e., mapping out evacuation centers and routes (Early Action Protocol summary. Uganda: Floods, 2021, p. 7-9). The URCS’ selecting practice hence reduced complexity to a level that matched the IFRC’s requirements. This resulted in an extremely high trigger level that would almost never be reached – and if ever reached, would basically only allow for “ultimate early actions” saving lives by evacuating people.

Zooming out: Analyzing the paradox of knowing more and doing less at the system level

After zooming in to explain the nexus of practices that constitutes operationalization and specification dynamics, we now zoom out to the system level to show the paradoxical relationship of these dynamics. Following abductive coding, we show how contradiction, interrelation, and persistence played out between those dynamics.

Contradiction. Our data analysis shows that operationalization dynamics, driven by the nexus of roadmapping and datafication, increased the level of detail and information to an extreme degree. Operationalizing the FbF approach implied the development of a standardized EAP template by the IFRC and the collection of data by the URCS to localize the protocol. This objective resulted in the gathering of highly precise data that produced deep knowledge about when to act (detailed early warning signals) and how to act (detailed accounts of early action activities). In contrast, specification dynamics, driven by the nexus of defining expectations and selecting, resulted in a very narrow selection of occasions to act (high trigger levels) and a very limited range of possible early actions (“ultimate” early actions to save lives). Zooming out to analyze the relation of both dynamics shows that the increasing level of knowledge – “knowing more” – confronted the URCS and IFRC with sheer endless options, created the need to specify actions and to break down information to a degree that finally resulted in a very coarse-grained detail of actions – “doing less”. This contradiction was experienced by multiple actors within the FbF system. For instance, a woman in the village of Butaleja, who was rather frustrated by the URCS asking questions, complained that “they [URCS] ask but they don’t bring”, highlighting the gap between knowledge creation and lacking action. In a different village, a URCS volunteer expressed her thoughts about the data collection. Rather emotionally, she described the tensions she was experiencing:

“It’s about data, data, data. They [URCS] only want data. But what actually happens with the data? They [URCS] now know everything but in the communities, nothing happens,

nothing changes. Please, let it not happen that you take the information and leave like that, don't let the information disappear.”

The volunteer's fear of the “disappearance” of the gathered knowledge became true not by a random loss of data but by the purposeful selection of data through the URCS and the revision process of the EAPs by the IFRC, which highlights the interrelation of both dynamics.

Interrelation. Zooming out to the system level reveals that the increase in complexity through operationalization and the decrease of complexity through specification not only show the dynamics' contradiction but also their interrelation. Since the increase in knowledge through operationalization generated endless options and occasions to act, this necessarily resulted in the need to limit and specify action to preserve the ability to act at all. Whereas community members and volunteers predominately experienced the contradictory nature of the dynamics, especially members of the URCS reflected on the interrelation of operationalization and specification. A FbF manager who was part of the EAP development described the interrelatedness of tensions and the resulting frustration of breaking down the collected information to match the IFRC standards by referring to the forecast model that was supposed to build the basis of the trigger activation.

“We tried to make use of the local knowledge which we had gathered by integrating it into GloFAS [Global Flood Awareness System], because we knew IFRC expected us to work with GloFAS in the EAP [...], but the model is far too unprecise, the radius is too broad, that's why we wanted to localize the model. But finally, there was no option of adding our data to GloFAS. It's absurd, we need to collect local data but if it [the information] is not the standard it will not be approved [by IFRC], then it's a waste of time.”

This statement describes the interrelatedness of the tension emerging between the gathering of knowledge and the reduction of information to handle increasing levels of complexity.

Persistence. Our data analysis not only revealed the contradictory yet interrelated relation of operationalization and specification dynamics at the system level but also shows the persistence of the paradoxical relation by highlighting the self-reinforcing nature of the dynamics. The dynamics of operationalization and specification of FbF and the resulting inaction of the approach did not stop the process but formed a repetitive cycle. The more knowledge was created through operationalization dynamics, the more specification was needed to handle the complexity at hand. At the same time, reducing information to a level that rendered the activation of FbF almost impossible triggered the urge to better understand the implementation

process and the respective stakeholders, once again fueling operationalization to foster the creation of more specific knowledge. For instance, after our first field trip to Uganda in September 2021, when we observed the collection of data for the flood EAP, we joined another round of data collection in March 2022, which then specifically focused on drought regions. These repetitive phases of operationalization and the interrelated specification dynamics kept the cycle alive and ensured the persistence of the paradoxical dynamics at the system level.

Zooming out to the system level to analyze the relationship of the dynamics hence shows the characteristics of contradiction, interrelation, and persistence, constituting the paradox of “knowing more and doing less”, which finally rendered FbF “a loaded gun which cannot be used” (URCS Manager, 2022). Figure 1 shows the contradictory yet interrelated and persistent interplay of the dynamics and the underlying nexus of practices.

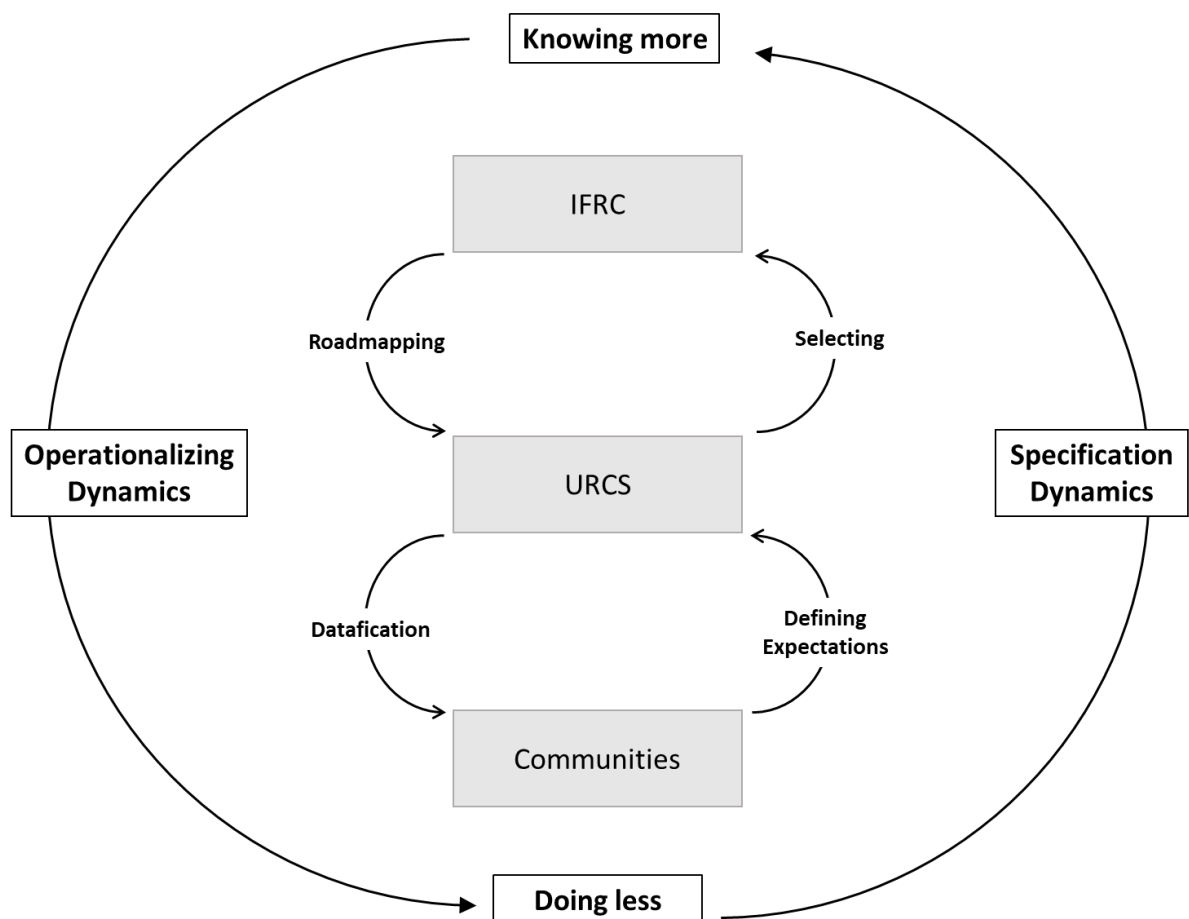


Figure 1: Paradoxical dynamics of knowing more and doing less

Part 2: Paradoxical Dynamic of Doing More and Knowing Less

Our data analysis revealed a second paradox, which we labeled “doing more and knowing less”. In a first step, we zoom in to explain how the nexus of specific practices drives institutionalization dynamics and defensive dynamics. In a second step, we zoom out to the system level and explain how the dynamics contradict each other, yet are interrelated and persistent.

Zooming in: Institutionalizing dynamics

The data analysis revealed a nexus of three practices driving the institutionalization of FbF: *capacity building, planning, and sensitizing*.

Capacity building by URCS. Aware that the success of FbF depended on the participation of the local URCS branches in the disaster-affected areas of Uganda, the URCS Headquarter engaged in the practice of “capacity building” with the purpose of enabling the branches to conduct FbF activities. The URCS implements their projects and strategies using a structure of 51 local branches across the country. Each branch consists of a branch manager and a network of volunteers responsible for community activities, such as the assessment of damage after disasters and emergency response. Since FbF builds on the engagement of the local branches in case the trigger is activated, the URCS conducted trainings and simulations to educate the volunteers on early actions and on the mechanisms behind FbF. The “FbF Practitioners Manual” (2021, p. 158) states:

“Branches especially in high-risk areas should frequently test FbF early actions through drills and simulations. Only if the volunteers and staff are trained and know exactly what to do before the extreme event strikes, can they fulfil their responsibilities.”

For the purpose of training, the URCS even developed a specific FbF curriculum. Depending on the level of experience (introductory, intermediate, advanced) the “Curriculum for Anticipatory Action” consisted of a “basic awareness course” as well as five days of training structured by eleven modules. The curriculum stated as the objective of the course design:

“This course targets Uganda Red Cross staff and volunteers who intend to increase their awareness of measures associated with disaster preparedness [...], as well as about the National Society’s potential role in Forecast-Based Financing/Anticipatory Actions.” (Curriculum for Anticipatory Action, 2022, p. 1)

The stated purpose of the curriculum demonstrates the URCS’ intention to build capacities and know-how at the branches, which constitute an important pillar within the FbF framework.

Planning by URCS. The URCS considers the role of local governments within the FbF approach as essential. District governments are typically accountable for taking actions after disasters as well as to incentivize and oversee preparedness activities at the community level; their participation in FbF was therefore imperative. Pursuing the purpose of integrating FbF in the district structures, the URCS engaged in the practice of “planning”, which centered around the collaboration with the district governments, to develop contingency plans. Despite the fact that every district is supposed to have a contingency plan that is regularly updated, many districts lacked plans about emergency procedures or available resources at the district level. The elected chairperson of the local government council in a flood-prone district admitted in an interview:

“Some years ago, the OPM [Office of the Prime Minister] supported us with the development of a contingency plan, but it’s outdated, I think it’s from 2017 or 2016 and it does not include any information about preparedness or anticipatory action.”

Aware of these gaps at the district level, the URCS invested in FbF workshops trying to push contingency plans that were sensitive to the FbF approach and included a clear focus on anticipatory action and preparedness measures. A URCS manager who was part of the conceptualization of these trainings explained the planning objective as follows:

“We need to cascade the FbF trainings and knowledge to the districts and integrate them in contingency plans and the local structures. At the moment, most of the government people lack the mindset for FbF, there is a big institutional gap at this level.”

Sensitizing by URCS. The institutionalization of FbF was also driven by the URCS’ practice of “sensitizing” the communities with the purpose of creating awareness for the FbF approach and the concept of anticipatory action. For instance, visiting the district Obongi, which hosts one of the largest refugee settlements in Uganda, we learned about a range of activities that URCS conducted in the settlements to promote awareness for early warning signals and preparedness measures.

Walking through the settlement, a URCS volunteer pointed towards a speaker at the middle of a square: “See the speaker? We use it to distribute messages about FbF.” When we asked what these messages were about, he explained: “You cannot just present facts, this is not working [...]. For example, we use songs that are about what people can do when the river [Nile] comes closer, and sometimes we do dances and theater plays with the kids here at the square to make them aware of floods and the signals they can observe.”

This scene depicts vividly how the URCS developed creative teaching concepts and sensitization approaches that distributed knowledge on early warning signals and preparedness

within the communities. The practice of sensitizing to create awareness about FbF at the community level hence presents an important source fueling the institutionalization of FbF.

Zooming in: Defensive dynamics

Exploring how the institutionalization efforts by the URCS were received by the branches, district governments, and communities, our data analysis revealed a nexus of three practices that drives what we labeled defensive dynamics: *sustaining newness*, *prioritizing*, and *preserving*.

Sustaining newness by branches. The URCS' activities to institutionalize FbF at the branch level implied the assumption that the branches and volunteers were now prepared for a possible FbF activation and becoming competent partners within the FbF framework. However, hiccups with processes, knowledge gaps, and problems continued to occur on a regular basis. Aiming at justifying these gaps and glitches, the branches engaged in the practice of what we labeled "sustaining newness", demonstrating that FbF was still a novel concept that branches were unfamiliar with. One example showing this practice is the concept of cash transfers. In case of a FbF activation, the branches are responsible for the smooth processing of mobile money to the communities so they can invest in preparedness measures, for example, by buying sandbags to protect their houses. However, FbF simulations revealed many problems with these cash transfers. Frequently, they were delayed and in an actual FbF scenario it would have been far too late to engage in early actions. Moreover, communities complained that only people with a mobile phone benefitted from the transfers and that oftentimes money was not received because volunteers could not read the handwritten phone numbers or no phone signal was available. Being confronted with these problems in a revision meeting at the URCS headquarters, a cash transfer officer responsible for the transfers at the branches tried to justify himself:

"The process is rather new to us. There are challenges that we will discuss in the cash transfer working group. We need to talk about how to come up with a common approach. We know there are still problems [...], but we'll get familiarized with it and it will improve."

Listening to the justification, a member of the FbF team sitting next to us in the meeting, whispered: "It's [cash transfers] rather new? This is nonsense, it has existed for more than three years now." The meeting demonstrated how the branches framed FbF and the related processes as still unfamiliar to them and as an ongoing learning process hence sustaining the newness of FbF.

Prioritizing by district governments. At the district level, members of the local governments responded to the URCS' attempts to integrate FbF in the district structures and contingency plans by enacting a practice we called "prioritizing". Pursuing the purpose of defending inaction, government representatives argued that they first had to concentrate on providing adequate emergency response before engaging in anticipatory action approaches. Despite explicitly recognizing the URCS' efforts in implementing FbF, district governments stressed that their focus was on emergency response and that they were unable to actually contribute to the approach. The Resident District Commissioner of a flood-prone district explained:

"Preparedness is key, we know that and we appreciate the work of the Red Cross [URCS] but it's not only about the communities when it comes to disasters. We as a district are exposed as well, the floods affect us, too. For example, the last time we experienced heavy rains, the whole police department was flooded and not accessible, we couldn't even access the villages, we were trapped. You see, actually, even for emergency response we can't do much, we lobby for support, but that's it basically. We have to improve disaster management first [...]."

This example shows that districts had already been overextended with emergency response and had hence not even considered engaging in anticipatory action. Besides, it became evident that most districts were fully aware that preparedness was critical but that they lacked funding to invest in anticipatory action. At a district in the eastern part of Uganda, the Chief Administrative Officer agreed to an interview. Explaining the district's budget, she mentioned preparedness as an "unfunded priority": "We list preparedness with 100 Schilling [$\sim 0,03\$$] in the budget. This allows us to save preparedness issues in the budget as priority without actually having a budget for them – an unfunded priority". This budgeting "trick" shows that districts were very much aware of the importance of anticipatory action approaches such as FbF but justified inaction by prioritizing emergency response and not dedicating actual budget to preparedness activities.

Preserving by communities. With the purpose of generating emotional safety, communities engaged in a practice that we labeled "preserving". While communities were increasingly confronted with FbF simulations and learning impulses, their everyday life remained the same. Flood-prone villages experienced the same regular floods during the year as usual, drought regions suffered from the absence of rain, but FbF was not activated once. In a village in the Nile region a volunteer told us:

“What shall they [communities] do? Every year the river is coming up more and more, they cannot go anywhere else [...]. You cannot blame them for having a short-term perspective, they live each day as it comes.”

Unable to actually experience the benefits of FbF and learn from these experiences, most communities stuck with old behaviors and drew safety and certainty from “doing what we have always done”. As the true potential of FbF was not seen, even existing interventions did not cause substantial change. Walking through a village that is affected by floods several times a year delivered insights about how much effort community members put into the practice of preserving. A local volunteer explained:

“Do you see the pole over there? This is a meteorological station providing local data for the forecast, no [correcting himself] it used to be. It’s not working anymore. First, the solar panels were stolen and then people from the neighboring village destroyed it. They were annoyed by the noise the thing makes.” Further walking through the backyard of a family who was excited by our visit, a woman proudly pointed towards the hen houses. The volunteer explained: “Ah the hen houses, the women make them from mosquito nets. They got them from the Red Cross [URCS] to prevent malaria in times of flooding but everyone uses them like that.”

In another village that had been part of a FbF simulation some months earlier on, a URCS volunteer mentioned that the early actions people were supposed to engage in did not work out as planned. She further mentioned that, for instance, many people did not use the cash transfers they had received to invest in preparedness measures, such as embankments, but used the money for – in their perception – more urgent issues, for example, to pay their kids’ school fees.

These scenes made us realize how difficult it was for the communities to switch their mindset towards anticipation when they had never actually experienced the benefits of FbF and why they could only secure emotional safety and stability by preserving their familiar way of living.

Zooming out: Analyzing the paradox of doing more and knowing less at the system level

After zooming in to explain the nexus of practices that drives the institutionalization of FbF and the nexus of practices that constitutes defensive dynamics, we now zoom out to the system level to show how the interplay of these dynamics entails the characteristics of *contradiction*, *interrelation*, and *persistence*, which constitute the paradox of *doing more and knowing less*.

Contradiction. The data analysis revealed how active the URCS became in pushing the institutionalization of FbF at different levels. Recognizing the importance of the engagement of key stakeholders, such as the URCS branches, the district governments, and the communities, the URCS engaged in capacity building, planning, and sensitizing practices, which aimed at integrating FbF at all levels and creating awareness for the approach. The increase in activity and interventions – “doing more” –, however, triggered defensive dynamics eventually resulting in the absence of learning, the feeling of unfamiliarity with the approach, and the preservation of old habits – “knowing less”. The tensions between the two dynamics became particularly apparent in the observation of the URCS members and their frustration when they realized that most of their institutionalization efforts did not only not have the desired outcomes but their intention and actual results also contradicted each other. For instance, after an interview with a local government representative, the responsible URCS manager expressed his anger:

“It’s unbelievable [...]. It is their [local government] job to care of their people but they just stick with their mindset and don’t do anything despite the fact that we support them wherever we can and lend them a helping hand [...] and then they even complain about their situation, that’s really ridiculous.”

Interrelation. While our analysis shows the contradiction between the URCS’ attempt to anchor FbF and the stakeholders’ defensive responses hindering this process and causing opposite effects, both dynamics are also interrelated. Especially in quiet moments like in the evenings during dinner or while driving, the URCS members shared their reflections about the FbF implementation process with us. A conversation with a volunteer rendered the interrelation of “doing more and knowing less” salient.

At the end of a set of interviews conducted in the communities, a member of the research team engaged in a conversation with a URCS volunteer on the ride back to the branch office. “Isn’t it frustrating? You do so much in the villages, but it seems there is no change.” “Indeed, but you know, it’s a chicken egg problem. We tell them to change and the good FbF will bring but they don’t experience FbF, they don’t learn, and then there is the next flood coming and they have to do something, so they do what they know [...]. And then URCS says, look they don’t have the mindset for early action, let’s do an activity in the villages, we have to do sensitization. You see, nothing is changing and that’s why they even have to do more.”

The reflections of the volunteer demonstrate the interrelatedness of institutionalization dynamics and defensive dynamics. The more the URCS pushed communities to change, the

more they stuck with familiar patterns. In a similar vein, we understood that the more the URCS pointed out the importance of FbF to the districts, the more the districts focused on the existing gaps and issues with emergency response and were not able to switch their minds towards preparedness. Exploring the role of the branches within the URCS structure further revealed the challenging situation they found themselves in. In an interview, a branch manager reported:

“The branches do not have an annual budget, we only get budget to conduct specific activities, for example, when a disaster has happened we can get budget to do an assessment [...]. The volunteers don’t get salary, only allowances for the activities they participate in like we are now doing with the interviews in the villages. [...] And they only get the money after the activities, most times they have to wait for months until they receive it.”

Understanding the lacking financial independence of the branches and that budget was never available in advance shows the rather reactive logic branch managers and volunteers had adapted to. While the URCS aimed at making branches “FbF ready” and building long-term capacities by trainings and simulations, the branches were stuck in a very short-term planning mode and therefore continuously perceived FbF as a novel approach they had to get used to first.

Persistence. Zooming out and analyzing the relation of institutionalization and defensive dynamics at the system level not only revealed their contradictory yet interrelated relationship but also showed the persistence of this relationship. Increasing activities and impulses to institutionalize FbF finally resulted in the preserving of “old knowledge” and the inability to shift towards a preparedness mindset. This result however, continuously spurred new institutionalization dynamics and triggered even larger efforts of the URCS to engage with their stakeholders and to actually integrate FbF at all levels. For instance, when we returned to the URCS Headquarter after a two-week field trip, a URCS Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) manager asked the colleagues who joined the trip about the situation “on the ground”. When they told her about the ongoing problems within the communities and the persistent challenges for FbF, she responded:

“I see, I see [...]. We definitely need to invest more in sensitization within the communities. It’s all about knowledge [...]. And I think we need to focus more on targeting women, they are the most vulnerable group.”

Her response shows the energy and resources that continuously fed institutionalization dynamics. The resulting self-reinforcing cycle hence ensured the recurrence of processes

fostering the persistence of the paradoxical dynamic. Figure 2 shows the paradoxical relation of the dynamics and the respective practices that fuel institutionalization and defensive dynamics.

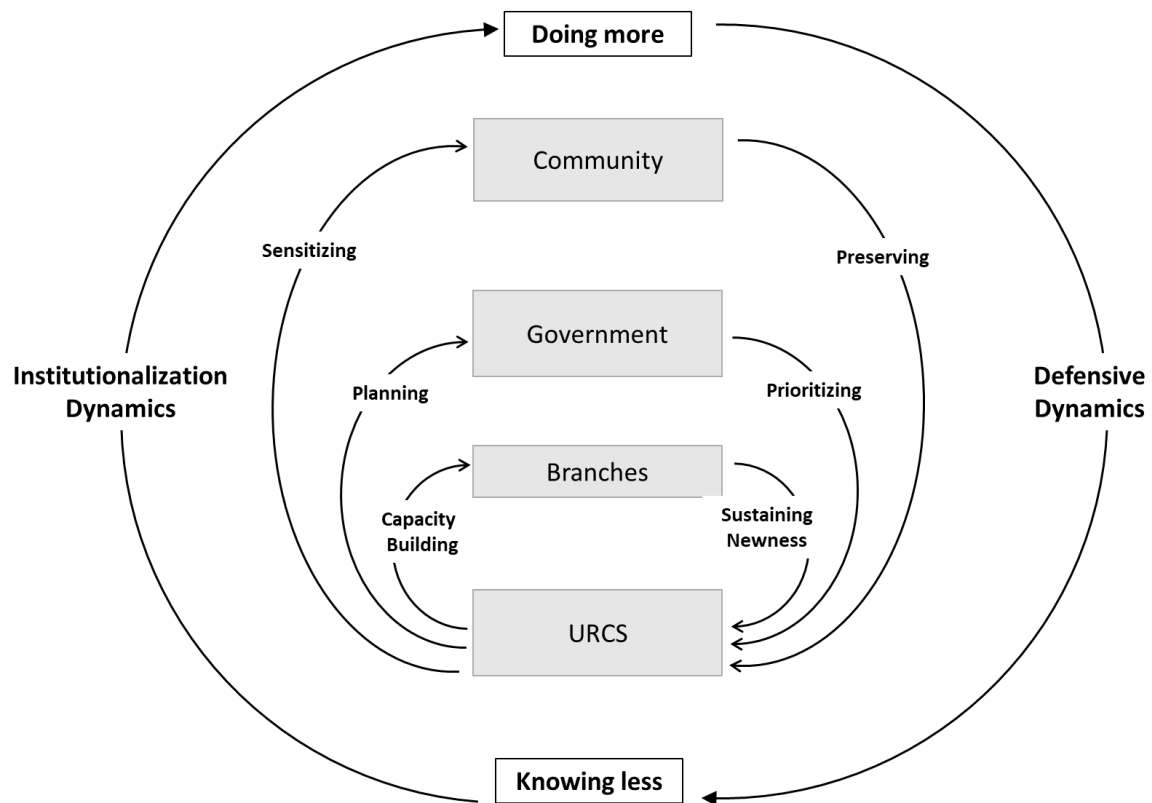


Figure 2: Paradoxical dynamics of doing more and knowing less

Process Summary: The Mutual Stabilization of Paradoxical Dynamics

Our findings describe two paradoxical dynamics: “Knowing more and doing less” (1) shows the contradictory yet interrelated interplay of operationalization (A) and specification dynamics (B), whereas “doing more and knowing less” (2) explains the paradoxical relation between institutionalization dynamics (C) and defensive dynamics (D). Our analysis revealed that each pair of dynamics evinces contradiction, interrelation, and persistence, which constitute self-reinforcing cycles. First, the nexus of the practices of roadmapping and datafication spurs operationalization dynamics (A), which result in extensive and detailed data, producing almost infinite options for when and how to act. At the same time, the nexus of the practices of defining expectations and selecting drives specification dynamics (B), which decrease the high level of complexity by determining triggers in a way that only approves the FbF activation in very rare, historic disasters, drastically limiting the scope of early actions. This self-reinforcing cycle

increases knowledge (knowing more) and decreases action (doing less). Second, the nexus of practices of capacity building, planning, and sensitizing fuels institutionalization dynamics (C), which confront actors with a shift towards a preparedness mindset. However, the nexus of practices of sustaining newness, prioritizing, and preserving constitutes defensive dynamics (D), which foster familiar patterns and prevent actors from learning. This second self-reinforcing cycle increases action (doing more) and decreases knowledge (knowing less). The process model in Figure 3 summarizes both paradoxical dynamics and illustrates their interrelation.

Zooming out to take a system level perspective shows that both paradoxes and the underlying nexus of practices do not represent isolated cycles but unfold in a dynamic interplay and, thereby, stabilize each other. The particular focus on our long-term observation of the FbF implementation process over a period of three years revealed that the dynamics were iterative and related. With regard to the paradox of “knowing more and doing less” (1), our data showed that the resulting inaction of FbF did not cause standstill or inertia within the system but, on the contrary, translated into institutionalization dynamics (C). While FbF was never triggered and hence no early actions have taken place, the URCS did not become a passive observer but engaged actively in institutionalization practices, transforming FbF’s actual inaction into action. At the same time, with regard to the paradox of “doing more and knowing less” (2), our data revealed that the reluctance to change and the absence of learning at different levels within the system triggered an urge to engage in further knowledge creation. The emergence of defensive dynamics (D) hence did not result in a blockage or the decision to stop activities but fueled specification dynamics (B). Tackling the persistent “stickiness” of the preparedness mindset within the system led to new initiatives aiming at “really understanding” what was going on at the ground. The IFRC hence pushed towards developing novel concepts for studies, which specified additional vulnerability groups, identified further aspects of indigenous knowledge and culture, and included different time horizons and variables. This urge for specification finally fueled further operationalization dynamics (A) and amplified the process of “knowing more”. Exploring the interrelation of both paradoxes helps to understand why, despite the strenuous efforts of all involved actors, the desired system change failed to materialize.

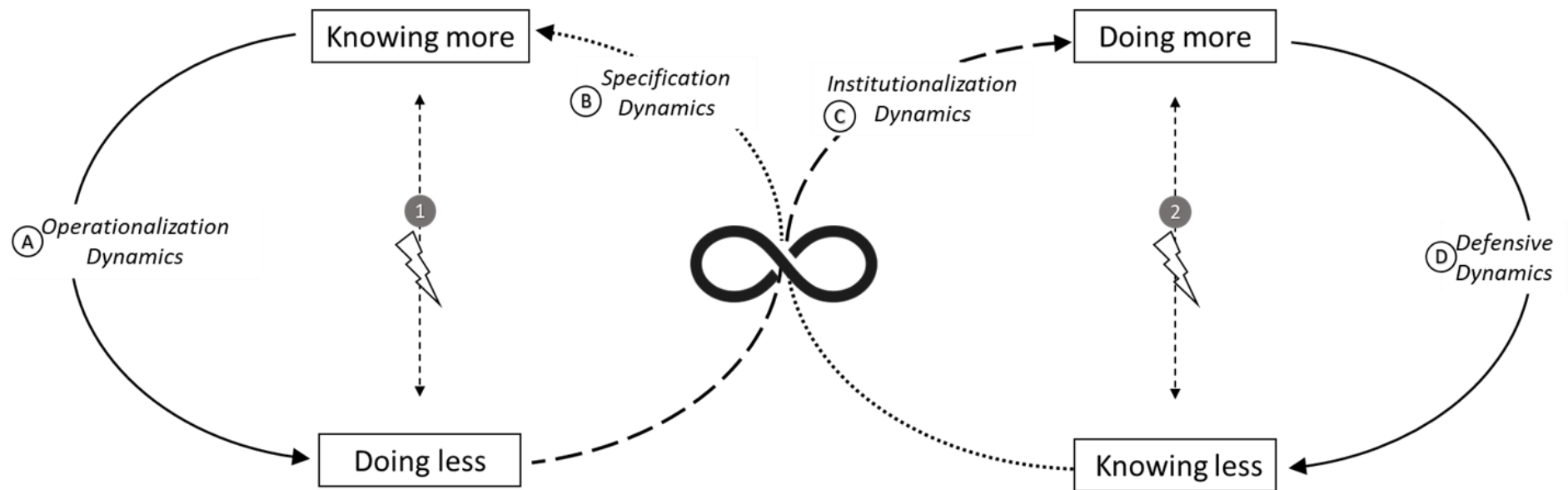


Figure 3: The mutual stabilization of paradoxical dynamics

Moreover, our findings underscore the enormous stability of the system since both paradoxical dynamics not only constitute self-reinforcing cycles that create equilibrium in themselves but also stabilize each other and, thereby, contribute to a path-dependent development. We hence show that the system is able to preserve its non-optimal equilibrium even if actors try to intervene in one of the dynamics, rendering change efforts nearly impossible. To summarize, our findings not only show how the nexus of practices translates into dynamics that fuel paradoxes at the system level and hence exceed the scope of action of single actors but also explain how the interaction of paradoxical dynamics creates a non-optimal but stable equilibrium resistant to change.

DISCUSSION

This study was motivated by understanding how system dynamics cause multi-actor paradoxes and how they influence the addressing of pressing grand challenges (George et al., 2016) such as climate-induced disasters. Revealing distinct practices that fuel contradictory yet interrelated dynamics at the system level, which interact and hence stabilize non-optimal, path-dependent equilibria, our study yielded several insights that contribute to the literature of grand challenges and the literature on paradox management.

Non-Optimal Equilibria as Barriers to Multi-Actor Approaches in Addressing Grand Challenges

First, we contribute to the literature on grand challenges by exploring why the attempts to trigger system change present such difficult and wicked endeavors and oftentimes fail or produce unintended consequences (Couture et al., 2022). More and more scholars draw attention to the fact that multi-stakeholder initiatives involving NGOs, governments, and industry not necessarily present a panacea in addressing grand challenges and that research needs to further explore why collective action approaches, such as MSIs, fall short of their missions (Dentoni et al., 2018; Gray et al., 2022). Our research supports these concerns by showing how the increasingly popular approach of anticipatory action, which has gained considerable momentum at the high-levels of international institutions (German Federal Foreign Office, 2022) and is endorsed by the relevant stakeholders, fails in materializing the intended paradigm shift within the humanitarian aid sector. While existing research on grand challenges links the failure of multi-actor approaches to divergent perspectives and values, conflicting interests of stakeholders, or resource imbalances (Ansari et al., 2013; Moog et al., 2014; Zimmermann et al., 2021), our findings paint a different picture. While contrasting

perspectives and sector affiliation certainly influence the involvement of actors in FbF, it is not the unwillingness or hesitancy of actors to engage in the approach or the lacking belief in the concept but the interplay of implementation practices at the system level that prevents the aimed paradigm shift. Revealing the paradoxical dynamics of “knowing more and doing less” and “doing more and knowing less” shows that actors’ immense activities and input in the implementation process creates a non-optimal but stable, path-dependent equilibrium, which is nurtured by self-reinforcing cycles. This is consistent with research on path dependence, which has convincingly made the case that self-reinforcing dynamics lock organizations onto paths they find difficult to leave (Koch, 2011; Sydow et al., 2005; Sydow et al., 2009). Our case extends these insights to the system level and shows how self-reinforcing dynamics contribute to the emergence of stable, path-dependent equilibria that cannot be broken by the initiative of single actors. This equilibrium state not only explains why the system persists and avoids collapsing at any point of the implementation process, but also highlights that any intervention by individual actors will hardly push the system out of balance. The system dynamics that are driven by actors’ practices not only reinforce themselves but stabilize each other with every new cycle of “doing more” and “knowing more”, which renders interventions ineffective. Moreover, since practices are continuously reproduced and become increasingly institutionalized (Amis et al., 2020) over each cycle, the resistance of the dynamics increases. Hence, as our findings show, a path-dependent state of lock-in is not to be equated with inertia and inaction; on the contrary: By enacting self-reinforcing practices, actors reinforce the path and keep its trajectory on track (Goh & Pentland, 2019). Our findings hence not only add explanatory power to the question of how paradoxical dynamics emerge and persist at the system level but also support recent research that builds on the concept of path dependency to explain how collective responses disconnect from the grand challenge they aim to address and become resistant to external shocks over time (Couture et al., 2022; Sydow et al., 2009). We therefore argue that the failure to substantially tackle the grand challenge is not only caused by the complexity of the problem at hand but strongly driven by the practices that aim at navigating the challenge, which shifts the attention to the fact that “working together to mitigate grand challenges [...] becomes a challenge in itself” (Couture et al., 2022, p. 3).

Towards a Dynamic Understanding of Paradoxes: Conceptualizing Paradoxes as Contradictory yet Interrelated Dynamics

Our findings contribute to paradox theory in at least two ways. First, we shed new light on the conceptualization of paradoxes as contradictory yet interrelated poles that persist over time

(Smith & Lewis, 2022; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Building on recent findings that highlight the unpredictable nature of paradoxes, drifting tendencies, and phases of disequilibrium (Jarzabkowski et al., 2022; Weiser & Laamanen, 2022), we argue that paradoxes are not necessarily stable poles that are interrelated, persist, and contradict each other. Instead our findings go beyond the recognition of paradoxes as stable entities (Cunha & Putnam, 2017) and suggest a more dynamic conceptualization. In our case, paradoxes did not emanate from opposing poles, but instead emerged from contradictory yet interrelated dynamics that were driven by multiple practices conducted by numerous actors. Hence the contradictory, interrelated tension results from the dynamics rather than from opposing poles. Such a dynamic understanding allows for a more complex and nuanced conceptualization of tensions and may explain why tackling them often confronts actors with an unsolvable task. Dynamizing paradoxes hence helps to understand why actors cannot simply identify and embrace distinct tensions since they cannot be pinned down to – at least temporally – stable poles but are fluid in nature and difficult to demarcate. Moreover, our findings show that paradoxical dynamics do not exist in isolation but interact and stabilize other paradoxical dynamics at the system level. Also, paradoxical dynamics may stabilize each another, which makes these dynamics very difficult to disentangle. Our findings hence contribute to the discussion of the nestedness and knottedness of tensions (Sheep et al., 2016), highlighting how paradoxes are recursively intertwined (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013) and how they become nested not only within single organizations (Gaim et al., 2021) but within an entire system (Schad & Bansal, 2018).

Second, our findings generate novel insights into the navigation and handling of paradoxes at the system level. Paradox theory predominately argues that embracing paradoxes, i.e., engaging in strategies of acceptance and resolution, fosters sustainability (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 394), whereas prioritizing one pole over the other is considered defensive (Lewis, 2000) and ultimately detrimental (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Nevertheless, more and more scholars criticize the idea of the superiority of the ‘both/and’ approaches and argue that the active embracing of paradoxes is oftentimes neither possible nor desirable (Berti & Cunha, 2022; Berti & Simpson, 2021; Gaim et al., 2021; Iivonen, 2017; Ungureanu et al., 2018). Studies show that sometimes paradoxes pose difficult challenges to actors and unfold in dysfunctional arrangements. For instance, paradoxes may trap actors in oppressive situations leaving them without the power to actively embrace tensions (Berti & Simpson, 2021) or are only embraced rhetorically but not substantially, creating a false mastery of paradox (Gaim et al., 2021). Furthermore, Ungureanu et al. (2018) find that the attempt to manage vicious circles generates further vicious circles, rendering the solution part of the problem. Our findings support this novel perspective by

demonstrating that it is not the inertia or passive behavior of actors that fuel paradoxical dynamics but on the contrary: The purposive enactment of practices to address the tension results in self-reinforcing dynamics, which lead to a wicked interplay of paradoxes. Hence, it is the interplay of paradoxical dynamics that creates a state of equilibrium, which stabilizes the system without producing positive outcomes, such as sustainability, creativity, or change, as suggested by Smith and Lewis (2011). Consequently, we suggest to engage more strongly with the critical potential of paradox theory (Berti & Cunha, 2022) and shed light to novel approaches to deal with paradoxes conceptualized as contradictory yet interrelated dynamics.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was motivated by the question of how system level dynamics initiate and drive multi-actor paradoxes and how these dynamics influence paradox navigation. Studying the implementation process of the anticipatory action approach of FbF in Uganda provided us with an exemplary case to explore how multiple actors' practices fuel paradoxical dynamics at the system level. However, this particular case also comes with some specific limitations. While purposefully observing the implementation process over a period of more than three years, we cannot predict how the FbF framework will develop in the future and whether external shocks to the system (e.g., cutting-off funding due to new global crises such as war) may affect the non-optimal but path-dependent equilibrium. Moreover, the FbF case presents a very unique setting where all stakeholders are vital to the approach's success, which keeps power imbalances in the cooperation to a minimum. Future research could therefore examine how system dynamics emerge and develop in a system that is subject to significant power imbalances. Since anticipatory action approaches are becoming more and more popular across the globe, future studies could engage in comparative case studies and compare how different set-ups (e.g., lower trigger levels) influence the approach and the implementation process. Finally, our findings show the emergence of an extremely path-dependent equilibrium state that is constantly stabilized by paradoxical dynamics; it would hence be very interesting to explore radical approaches to system change, for instance, to explore the possibilities of transferring psychological approaches, such as paradoxical intervention (Watzlawick et al., 1974), to intervene in such path-dependent equilibria.

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Appendix

A1 Summary of Dissertation

Increasing complexity and ambiguity of institutional environments amplify and surface ‘wicked’ problems and entangled tensions that organizations need to navigate to ensure their survival. The main body of management and organization literature defines tensions that are contradictory yet interrelated and persistent as ‘paradoxes’ and argues that organizations need to ‘embrace’ opposing poles to generate positive outcomes. However, paradox scholars begin to challenge some of the core assumptions underlying paradox theory and raise questions about limitations and ‘dark sides’ of paradox management. Critically addressing these crossroads in paradox theory, the cumulative dissertation aims at exploring paradoxes of legitimacy, scaling and temporality in the context of grand challenges. In four articles, the dissertation explores how paradoxes emerge and develop in the context of complex societal challenges and how organizations address paradoxes, especially when they exceed individual mastery. Answering these research questions, the dissertation focuses on the elusive relation of diversity and homogeneity in public personnel management and reveals how managing the interplay of both concepts may lead to unintended and paradoxical consequences (Article I). Challenging the underpinnings of paradox theory, Article II identifies central assumptions of the discourse and develops alternative perspectives that demonstrate gaps and novel avenues for research. Empirically addressing the boundary conditions and ‘dark sides’ of paradox management, Article III focuses on the paradoxical nature of legitimacy repair and shows how paradoxes are co-created and thus go beyond the capability of single organizations. Finally, bridging paradox theory and a system level perspective (Article IV), the dissertation reveals how system level dynamics initiate and drive multi-actor paradoxes that hinder the tackling of grand challenges. Overall, the dissertation contributes to paradox theory and the scholarly discourse on grand challenges in four ways. First, the dissertation adds to extant paradox literature by problematizing taken-for-granted assumptions and by developing novel perspectives that have the potential to push paradox theory beyond its current limitations. Second, the dissertation provides new empirical insights on the ‘dark sides’ of paradoxes and the creation of paradox traps that hinder organizations from successfully managing tensions. Third, bridging paradox theory and a system level perspective generates novel findings on how paradoxical tensions emerge beyond organizational boundaries and how the interplay of paradoxes may cause non-optimal but path-dependent equilibria. Fourth, from a methodological perspective, the dissertation highlights how zooming out from organizational practices to nexuses of practices and system dynamics facilitates understanding the emergence of paradoxes at a higher level of analysis.

A2 Zusammenfassung der Dissertation

Die steigende Komplexität und Ambiguität institutioneller Umwelten verstärkt das Auftreten von scheinbar unlösbaren und verwobenen Spannungsfeldern, denen sich Organisationen stellen müssen, um ihr Bestehen zu sichern. Die Organisations- und Managementforschung definiert Spannungen, die durch persistente, widersprüchliche, aber interdependente Elemente geprägt sind, als „Paradoxien“. Organisationen wird empfohlen, solche paradoxen Spannungen auszuhalten und diese aktiv in ein Gleichgewicht zu bringen, anstatt einen Spannungspol zu priorisieren. Der erfolgreiche Umgang mit Paradoxien soll folglich zu nachhaltigeren Lösungen führen sowie Kreativität und Innovation fördern. Diese überwiegend positive Sichtweise und ihre zugrundeliegenden Annahmen werden jedoch zunehmend kritisch hinterfragt und die Rahmenbedingungen und Grenzen der Paradoxieforschung in den Mittelpunkt gerückt.

Die vorliegende kumulative Dissertation folgt dieser kritischen Perspektive und beschäftigt sich mit Paradoxien der Legitimität, der Skalierung sowie der Temporalität im Kontext sogenannter „Grand Challenges“ – komplexe, globale Herausforderungen von höchster gesellschaftlicher Relevanz. In vier Forschungsartikeln widmet sich die Doktorarbeit den Fragen, wie solche komplexen Problemfelder Paradoxien erzeugen und wie Organisationen mit ebendiesen umgehen, vor allem dann, wenn Spannungen den organisationalen Rahmen übersteigen. Diese Forschungsfragen adressierend, beschäftigt sich Artikel I mit dem konzeptionell unbestimmten Spannungsfeld von Diversität und Homogenität im öffentlichen Sektor und zeigt, wie der Umgang mit den konfliktären Konzepten nicht-intendierte, paradoxe Effekte verursachen kann. Artikel II hinterfragt die theoretischen Grundfesten der Paradoxieforschung, indem die Kernannahmen des Forschungsdiskurses identifiziert und alternative Positionen entwickelt werden, die wiederum neue Forschungsfragen aufwerfen. Artikel III behandelt die Paradoxie scheiternder Legitimitätswiederherstellung und adressiert empirisch die Grenzen des Paradoxienmanagements. Der Beitrag zeigt, dass Paradoxien nicht von einer Organisation alleine adressiert werden können, wenn diese von unterschiedlichen Akteuren ko-konstruiert wurden und somit den Handlungsrahmen einer einzelnen Organisation übersteigen. Artikel IV verbindet schließlich Paradoxie- und Systemforschung und zeigt auf, wie Systemdynamiken Multi-Akteurs-Paradoxien erzeugen können, die den Umgang von komplexen, globalen Herausforderungen erschweren und systemischen Wandel verhindern.

Die vorliegende Dissertation leistet vier Kernbeiträge zur Paradoxieforschung und der wissenschaftlichen Grand Challenge Debatte. Erstens treibt sie die aktuelle Forschung zu Paradoxien voran, indem sie akzeptierte Annahmen kritisch hinterfragt und so neue

Perspektiven aufzeigt, die das Potential haben, bestehende Limitationen zu überwinden. Zweitens generiert die Dissertation relevante empirische Erkenntnisse zu den sogenannten „dunklen Seiten“ des Paradoxiemanagements und der Entstehung von Teufelskreisen, die einen produktiven Umgang mit Paradoxien verhindern. Drittens schlägt die Dissertation eine Brücke zwischen Paradoxieforschung und Forschung zu Systemdynamiken. Diese Perspektive zeigt auf, wie Paradoxien außerhalb der organisatorischen Grenzen auf der Systemebene entstehen und wie das Zusammenspiel von paradoxen Dynamiken nicht-optimale, pfadabhängige Gleichgewichte erzeugen kann. Viertens leistet die Arbeit einen wichtigen methodischen Beitrag, indem sie aufzeigt, wie organisationale Praktiken Nexus formen, die Dynamiken anstoßen und sich schließlich als Paradoxien auf einer höheren analytischen Ebene offenbaren.